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If a sport be judged by its literature, few if any are more richly endowed than angling. The simplest of sports has produced an almost unparalleled harvest of writing which is notable for its wit and charm. This volume is not an anthology of classic writing about fishing, though it is enriched by many choice quotations. All the major contributions have been written especially for this book by the best angling writers of our day (listed on the back flap of this jacket). Most of them are famous experts; some are hitherto undiscovered writers who have something fresh and individual to say.

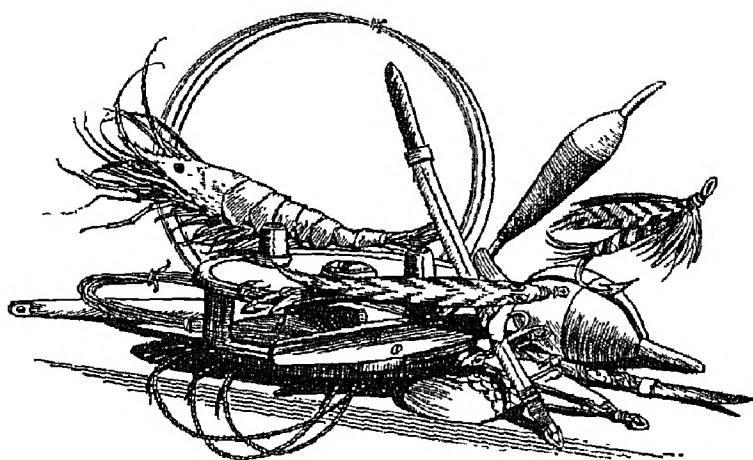
All aspects of angling are touched upon — freshwater and sea, lake and river, game and coarse. It is not a didactic textbook, but a distillation of flavours; reminiscent and reflective, often funny, never pompous. There is something in every mood, for every angler who, away from the waterside, wants nothing better than a re-creation of waterside delights.



THE ANGLER'S BEDSIDE BOOK







# The Angler's Bedside Book

Edited by  
MAURICE WIGGIN

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To

C. THURLOW CRAIG

“Carlos” of happy memories and  
unending adventures, both Up  
Country and down, the Editor  
dedicates this book in gratitude  
for all pleasures received

*But every fish loves not each bait alike,  
Although sometimes they feed upon the same;  
But some do one, and some another seek,  
As best unto their appetite do frame,  
The roach, the bream, the carp, the chub, the bleak  
With paste or corn, their greedy hunger tame;  
The dace, the ruffe, the gudgeon and the rest  
The smaller sort of crawling roms love best.*

*The chavender and chub do more delight  
To feed on tender cheese or cherries red,  
Black snails, their bellies slit to show their white,  
Or grasshoppers that skip in every mead;  
The perch, the tench, and eel do rather bite  
At great red worms, in field or garden bred,  
That have been scoured in moss or fennel rough  
To rid their filth, and make them hard and tough.*

SECRETS OF ANGLING, 1613, by John Denny  
(spelling modernised)



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## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

This is *not* an anthology. It is a collection of new writing, specially commissioned from some of the liveliest and most knowledgeable angling writers of our time. True, I've interspersed between the new material any number of quotations from older books; but by and large and basically this is a book of *new* writing.

It is also to some extent a book of new writers. Naturally, when Batsford's asked me to edit an angling book, I instantly slipped the cuffs on various first-rate writers who have made unchallengeable reputations; thus you will find here Bernard Venables' great story of his mammoth shark, which nearly killed him; a scholarly dissertation on the Whirling Blue Dun by that prince of entomologists, David Jacques; a thoughtful and fruitful piece of original research into fly fishing by Major Oliver Kite; and Macdonald "Cork on the Water" Hastings doing a delightful detective job on the last Thames salmon. You will find characteristic and characterful contributions by such stalwarts as Howard Marshall, Kenneth Mansfield, Frank Sawyer, Jack Hargreaves and C. V. Hancock. You will find what I must say I think is a really superb meditation on the essence of angling by Eric Horsfall Turner.

But you will also find contributions by writers whom I am very happy to introduce. That charming and accomplished artist, Will Nickless, who has also illustrated this book, writes of boyhood assaults on Highgate Ponds with irresistible nostalgia. James Cadell, known as a novelist and translator, who shares my strange passion for vintage cars, writes of the attraction of still



## *Editor's Introduction*

water. Richard Garnett, non-writing son of writers, has been persuaded to follow his parents' footsteps and break into print about his immensely varied angling experiences. My old pal Bill Cumper, one of the wildest of unorthodox anglers—and that's putting it mildly—has at last coughed up some of his secrets, though I had to use threats and a tape recorder to get them. W. J. Pezare is a new writer whom I think you may be glad to meet. Hugh Falkus, the sea trout specialist, though by no means a new writer, is not nearly so well known as I think he should be. John Baker is that rarest of birds, a publisher who can really write.

To put Richard Walker forward as a new writer may seem a weird sort of joke. But although "everybody" knows Dick Walker as the outstanding didactic angling writer of our day, a practical if contentious genius who has transformed techniques in what amounts almost to a one-man revolution, comparatively few know him as a very funny writer indeed. I am happy to show him here in his role of rustic Runyon.

And all these are backed up by a corps of enthusiasts who really know their stuff. William B. Currie breaks new ground—or new ice—in Finland; T. K. Wilson claims that Yorkshire is the angler's paradise, and comes pretty near to proving it; Jack Thorndike, one of the stalwarts of angling journalism, writes engagingly about his curious editorial chores. Peter Tombleson on fish recognition, Ieuan D. Owen on fly fishing in Wales, Fred J. Taylor on the specialist sessions for which he and his redoubtable brothers are famous—these are all good men and true, full life-members of the brotherhood. And I hope you will agree that F. W. (Ted) Holiday is one of our most original and irrepressible angling humorists.

Looking back on this rum editorial experience, which has given me a few extra grey hairs, I can only say that catching specimen fish is on the whole easier, less arduous and frustrating, than catching specimen fishing writers. Well, here is my bag, for your approval: a mixed bag, as befits an all-round angler. I think there's something in it for almost every mood—humour, reminiscence, narrative, philosophy, and quite a lot of illuminating hard gen. Primarily, of course, it's an entertainment: something to console and beguile you on those days when the water's out of order, as it so often is.

*Spring, 1965*

M. W.



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BERNARD VENABLES

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*The Great Shark of  
the Noisy Sea*

BERNARD VENABLES is one of angling's greatest names. For long Angling Correspondent of the *Daily Mirror*, where his strip cartoon "Mr. Crabtree Goes Fishing" appealed to a vast public, he became, with Howard Marshall, a co-founder and first Editorial Director of *Angling Times*. Was founder-editor of *Creel*, and is the author of many books, including *Mr. Crabtree Goes Fishing*, *The Angler's Companion*, and *The Gentle Art of Angling*. A first-class artist, BV lives in Wiltshire.



## *The Great Shark of the Noisy Sea*

BERNARD VENABLES

IN THE ATLANTIC there is an abyss; it was that which fixed my fascinated attention. It was thinking of the abyss, and of giant fish, that took me to Madeira. I had become absorbed with the idea of great fish, fish of a hugeness hitherto almost unimaginable except to those who travelled to such exotically distant places as the Caribbean and the Pacific and those warm antipodean waters of the Great Barrier Reef. There, in those far-off waters, there were great dramas of fishing to be had on almost any day; or so it appeared in the mundane coolness of the North—and all this, you must remember, was in that time, years back, when possibilities of big game in near waters had hardly become something for conjecture. There had been a flurry of adventure in the North Sea through the earlier years of this century, when hardy men had taken tunny, the great blue fin tuna; but all that was ended when the war was over. The over-harried shoals of herring had retreated north, and with their going the tunny had gone too; it was the herring shoals they preyed upon. But the idea of marine big game had been kindled and did not die, and when shark began to be fished for, and taken, off Cornwall, there came a realisation of the hunger for such salty adventure.

The sound of it, shark fishing, the picture it raised of stark and fiercely fine



## *The Great Shark of the Noisy Sea*

experience, drew me as it drew others, and soon I had caught my many sharks. But, once the first innocence of imagination had been translated to fact, it was to be seen that this was indeed minor game. The shark, mostly blue shark, long and elegantly sleek and beautifully blue and white of belly, were small. They were only quite seldom over a hundred pounds and were often much smaller. They were probationary fish, fish for the first schooling of those in whose minds there simmered the idea of truly big game. So it was that I fell more and more to thinking, almost broodingly, of the great fish of those far-off warmer waters that still seemed unattainable.

But surely, I thought—seeing them in my mind's eye in the transparent blue depths of their tropical and sub-tropical places—surely there must be other places, nearer places, where the biological context has no essential difference; there must be nearer seas as able to breed such giants. I became absorbed in scanning those nearer seas which had some relative ease of access, and it was with a sort of inevitability that I came at last to a preoccupation with Madeira.

It was a growing awareness of the abyss and its significance that led me to the idea of Madeira. That there is a vast crater in the Atlantic I had known, and now I learned of the hardly conceivable eruption that there had been in the remote distance of Earth's adolescence. It had left this monstrous hole, more than 3000 fathoms deep; on its western lip lay the Azores, and in the east Portugal on its northern lip and Madeira on the southern one. The great oceanic current that comes up from the Caribbean, the North Atlantic Drift, turns round the northerly edge of the pit till it meets the mass of Europe, and there it bifurcates, one arm going northwards, the other curving down past the North African coast to Madeira. The current comes richly laden with an immensity of planktonic life which is the basis of all sea feeding, and, in the so to speak, great whirlpools set up where the current meets Europe and Africa, the plankton is concentrated.

In Madeira's sub-tropical latitude the warm water temperature would stimulate further the eruptive multiplication of planktonic life. It is a constant of life in water that where plankton is rich, so is all other organic life; plankton is the essential basis of the pyramid of life and, it seemed to me, it could *not* be otherwise than there should be marine monsters in the waters of Madeira. For reasons that are no longer clear to me, it was with the idea of vast shark that I became obsessed, rather than with great fish of other kinds. Perhaps it was the fearsomeness of the thought of a shark huge almost beyond imagination that was so obsessive.

Madeira also had the qualification of reasonable accessibility; regular cruises by the Bergen Steamship Company called there, and so it was that on a day in January 1959 I left Southampton armed with a lot of theory and no

## *The Great Shark of the Noisy Sea*

practical knowledge of the fishing circumstances I should find at Madeira. A pregnant omission that was to prove.

And there at last was Madeira, a dazzling cone of life in the Atlantic's vast blue plane, a confirmation it seemed to me at first encounter. Under the sun the sense of life simmered—the warmth of the scented air, the torrential blossom, the terraced pile of land to the crater, now cold, that had once erupted this island into being. Bananas and oranges and sugar grew near the sea, and above that were the eucalyptuses and the agapanthus lilies beside the road. I looked at the sea, deep blue, with its oceanic inscrutability, and I thought I read it. There, there *must* be, if anywhere in the world's seas, immense shark.

But no, I was told in Funchal, there are shark in plenty in these waters, shark of many kinds; but not monstrous ones. Hammerhead shark teemed, and there were blue shark and mako shark and other species too; but none but quite small ones had ever been seen, up to about two hundred pounds at the most. But the conviction in me stayed firm; great shark there *must* be. By what biological exception could they not be there? I began to fish, and nothing more tentative, in *that* hugely amorphous problem of water, could there ever have been in fishing.

The first shock of revelation was that of scale, depth. I had been accustomed, so far, to such depths as Cornish sea gave; forty fathoms there is deep, and my tackle that had seemed heavy when I had taken it out of England was suddenly puny. Six hundred yards of line there were on the reel, 120 pounds breaking strain, and how was this to seek out the critical places of so vast a plunge as these waters had? Madeira, you see, is an extinct volcano thrown up from the remote floor of the abyss. The tides and winds of the centuries have worn out litoral shallows from the flanks of the cone, but these, I now found, were proportionate to the environmental immensity. A few hundred yards from the sunny beaches there were black depths of five hundred yards, six hundred yards. These were the littoral shallows. Then these ended at the chasm's lip, that edge whose name, translated in English, is *The Noisy Sea*. At that edge the depth plunged awesomely to a thousand fathoms and two thousand fathoms. It was in that vast anonymity I had to find my monster.

There was no guide, no stored experience of any who had gone before. In the sense of what I sought I was the first explorer of the blank vastness of this marine jungle. Fishing for marlin and for tunny there had been, but this had been surface fishing, and its success made no track for me to follow. And, for a fair chance in this exploration, so wide a one, there should be time, plenty of time. I had ten days stay in Madeira in which to bring my search to the culmination of a monstrous fish. Of those ten days five were to be

## *The Great Shark of the Noisy Sea*

lost—this was the open Atlantic, far from land horizons. Great seas pile up often and quickly there; there are many days when a small boat may not put to sea. It was a lot to do in little time; it could easily have appeared hopeless.

Just one advantage there was, one that there must always be where there are anglers—and that indeed means almost anywhere that there are men. There was given to me the unlimited good will and help of the anglers of Funchal, of Dr. Ribeiro and the members of *O Estaleiro*, the angling club of Funchal. Dr. Ribeiro was then the only big game fisherman on the island. It was from conversations with them that there emerged some sort of a picture of the nature of the bottom under the blue Atlantic heave. It was thus I heard of *The Noisy Sea*. Dr. Ribeiro told me of it; it was, he said, a traditional Portuguese name for the brink of the abyss, and all the generations of Madeiran commercial fishermen who go to sea (and too often do not return) in their small boats with sail and oars, have found that it is there, on the brink, that there is the greatest concourse of fish.

There then was a point of reckoning, and another was the whale factory at Machico. Madeira has its own whaling industry, still pursued with that patient unconscious bravery that is so characteristic of Portuguese sea peasants, small brown intrepid men who seek their huge quarry in quite small open boats and with primitive harpoons. To the factory at Machico the catch is taken, and the waste matter, blood and offal, goes into the sea. That place if any, I thought, should attract the scenting, hungry, foraging shark. And there was Ponto do Pargo, at the island's western end; there, Dr. Ribeiro told me, you could start precisely under the lighthouse and make a drift out over great numbers of hammerhead shark, and, though they were mostly small, could it not be that the deeper layers of water might hold greater fish? The only other mark of possible significance was the Desertas, that small group of islands, savage uninhabited peaks standing from the sea twenty miles offshore from Funchal. The fishing of their shallows was known to be rich, and thus certainly there would be shark. There could be big ones.

That, then, was the total sum of fact from which I could start; that, and the universal fact that shark anywhere will pick up and follow a scent, follow it for great distances to home on its origin.

Now, looking back, all drops into place; there is an apparent inevitability about it. That great shark could only have been found where at last I found it. But then, going haltingly from stage to stage, form and cohesion came only gradually to the picture. I had first to free my thinking from its basis on the shallow waters of Cornwall, to perceive the real nature of this context of black depths. Shark as I had known them were pelagic fish, swimmers in the upper levels of water, and it was upon this that my first tactics were founded. If, I thought, I drifted with the bait at, say, twenty-five fathoms, laying a

## *The Great Shark of the Noisy Sea*

rubby-dubby smear to attract the shark, I should find them. And where more certainly should I find them than off the whale factory? In that indeed I was right, as was eventually to be proved; but so much confusion lay in those imponderable depths.

So then, on that first day, I went with fair confidence, going in the fishing launch *Altair* under the soaring coastal crags till I was three miles off Machico, but, being blank there, moved in till I was close under the whale factory. All the time I fished the bait at twenty-five fathoms. The hours passed in the long Atlantic swell under that sub-tropical sun, and then night dropped as it does in those latitudes, suddenly, and there were no shark. Still, as was to be retrospectively plain, I had not grasped the significance of the great depth or of the *The Noisy Sea*; and, then, I was still unaware of the identity of the huge shark that lay so deeply below. I was puzzled and disappointed that this vicinity of the whale factory should have shown nothing.

Next day, when I went under the awesome heights of the volcanic cliffs westward to Ponto do Pargo, I had still not grasped the absent factor. I had, though I did not know it, all the right factors but this one, this one that was to prove all. Ponto do Pargo is the island's westernmost point; it is there that protection ends from the prevailing northerly winds, and the great seas, rolling down, pile and toss against those of the southern side. We, to make our drift from directly under the lighthouse, had to put ourselves to the mercy of that rather fearsome swell, and, dwarfed by its towering crests, we had to run for shelter again under the southern lea of the island. There for the rest of the day, drifting a few miles out under the fantastic face of the coastal precipice, I fished as abortively as I had the day before until night's sudden fall. There were no shark, but I was as certain still that patient moving from step to step would find them; find that great one I sought; it was next day that there came the evidence that began to fill the empty space in the pattern.

This next day I did not go to sea. With Avelino Camara I went to the fish market and saw there that fish of the abyss, a strange long eel-like fish, the espada, with huge jaws and long fangs; I heard of the fantastic depths at which it is taken, it and other fish. Now, at last, I began to apprehend this other dimension, the enormous plunge of depth. And, the day following, when I went with Avelino Camara to the Desertas, one more drop of evidence fell into the enlarging pool.

It is a strange wild little archipelago; it has the look of having just emerged from the volcanic upheaval, hardly cool from the hot thrust, hardly stilled from the molten drip of rock. The swell broke into a huge white lace against the high red thrust of rock into the sky. Here, in the thread of channels between these lonely fangs of rock the Funchal anglers find their sport with the bottom feeding fish, pargo and the rest, and I, using a rubby-dubby trail,

## *The Great Shark of the Noisy Sea*

soon had a shark. But it was a small one, fifty pounds perhaps, and nothing to do with the great game I sought. And, fishing there, Avelino Camara told me that their fishing of the Desertas is normally something for summer; this was winter, when the big fish went deep. Now, for the first time, I began to comprehend the meaning of that, what "deep" signified in this context. The idea had set, it grew, and I began to see that if my monster was to be found it would be at some as yet unexplored profundity of depth. I would, I thought, go out, straight out, seek *The Noisy Sea*, probe its black depth.

And so next day I did, going out from Funchal as the commercial boats do, and I began to fish at first a mile out. Then the small boats of the commercial fisherman passed, riding cork-like on the swell. They waved "on, on" . . . "go out further", they said, "go out until Machico comes into view beyond the point". Then we would be over *The Noisy Sea*. But, when we got there, the drift in the heavy current defeated all attempts to get the bait down; no amount of lead I could put on could prevent the tackle streaming out scarcely below the surface. But, as the fruitless hours went by I fell into talking with Fernando and Orlando who crewed the boat, and they began to talk of the espada fishermen. They told me of the depths in which the espada are taken—fantastic depths, a thousand fathoms and more, and how often in winter other fish would be taken, tunny, swordfish, shark. Now it was to be seen that now, in winter, this sunny winter of spangled air and soft warmth, it was in none but very deep water I could expect to find my fish. Here was the last link; here was the factor to bring all together, and, by happy chance, no more, the next day brought that which pin-pointed it.

It was a Sunday, when we could not go to sea, and in the morning Avelino Camara came urgently to say that at Machico a great fish had been taken on a handline. In the afternoon we drove to Machico and there on the beach was the fish. It lay there in the sun, a shark of about 400 pounds I guessed it to be, and it was of a species that I had not till then seen. It was a fearsome beast with the teeth of its lower jaw long, serrated edged. I stared at it and knew it to be the last step. We talked to those who had taken it, heard that it had been taken out from the whale factory, but in deep water, on the brink of the abyss, at *The Noisy Sea*. I had been right about the whale factory; I had just not perceived the significance of depth.

Here was the end. The next day, my last day, we would go to that place, and there, at that eleventh hour, I would find my monster. Those fishermen who had caught this shark would come with us to guide us. The evening I gave to the devising of the tackle.

It was clear that if I were to use a weight that could take the tackle down, and if that weight were above the trace, the trace would ride up and foul the line. And too it was to be seen that lead could not be used; something heavier,

## *The Great Shark of the Noisy Sea*

something expendable must be used. A piece of rock, that must be it. The traces I had were steel cable, 560 pounds breaking strain, and they were in three links with swivels between. To the first swivel up from the hook I would tie a fathom of low breaking strain nylon, and to that I would tie the rock. Thus, all going well, on the shark's taking of the bait, and the strike, the nylon would part. On the bottom link of trace I would have a large piece of cork to buoy it up from the bottom. Now I waited for the next day, confident, excited in the certainty that I would take my monster.

The day, this last day, started fine but with a threat of the torrential sub-tropical rain that comes in Madeira's winter. I had a sense of something already predicted, fated, as *Altair* left the harbour. Under the towering threat of the cliffs we steamed eastwards, an hour and a half, to Machico. There, on the quay, were the old man and the two boys who were our guides to the mark. At first attempt we were too far out; we moved in, in to about a mile off Machico. A bigger sea had begun to run; the sky had darkened. The drama had begun.

My tackle was strong; I would have thought it, in other circumstances, the match for anything. On the eight-inch Fortuna reel there were six hundred yards of line, the rod was the Hardy No. 5 Saltwater; it was, relatively, a massive outfit. Who could have known how perilously nearly it was not the equal of that situation? That it did stand so desperate an assault is a tribute indeed. The bait was a monstrous cluster of squid, a full foot's length of it, topped off with half a dozen sardines.

Now it, with the great stone on the trace as weight, was lowered over the side. But at once it became plain that not even that, that lump of basalt, could take the bait down in the heavy drift. The line swung up, streamed out in the drift; I could not induce it to plumb down. That it should do so was essential; I must get down, get to the bottom. It was obvious I never should from *Altair's* deck.

The sea was still becoming bigger, the sky darkening; the answer to the dilemma was not an hospitable one. We must put back into Machico, and, when we did, we towed out a small boat ten feet long, or perhaps twelve feet. In its stern was some decking which had in it a small square opening. The old man and the two boys were to man it and row to counteract the drift, thus allowing me to get down with bait and weight. I was to sit in the opening in the stern decking.

So there presently I was, cast off in the small boat, taken into the now big lift and fall of the swell, sometimes seeing the launch, sometimes losing it. If and when I hooked a fish the launch was to come up so that I might go aboard and fight the fish from the fighting chair. Now I could get down; now, now I could find bottom. To do it I had to give five hundred of my

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six hundred yards. Now I was worrying, straining ahead to what I must do to gain line, to lift the fish early to put back precious yards on the reel.

And now, suddenly, quietly so far below, so soon, it was there—the pluck, the pluck again, then the wait and then a heavier draw and I had struck and now there was the full vast weight, a monstrous force. The *Altair* was signalled up and it came, bucketing and plunging. To go aboard a launch with quite high freeboard from a small dinghy in a big sea is, at any time, difficult. Now I had to do it while the enormous power below fought away from the (as it seemed) puny restraint of the rod. I had no consciousness of going aboard; I had been in the dinghy, I was aboard the launch, in the fighting chair with the rod in the gymbal. I was fighting, straining almost beyond the power of strain to pump, to lift the fish, to put some line on the reel. And then the line was slack; the power suddenly was not there. I reeled in, the long slow wind, wondering sickly. Now here at last was the trace. It, that steel cable, was bitten through, sheered through like a wisp of wool. Three minutes that had taken.

Now I was in the dinghy again, with a new trace, a new bait, and now the seas were growing, and, presently, the rain came, vertical rods of rain, beating through my thin tropical clothes, soaking me as if I had been dipped. The rain passed and came again and time ticked away. I had five hundred and fifty yards of line out now, only fifty left on the reel. About an hour passed.

And now—there it was again—I had struck and there again was that vast drag of force, a power so immense, so fierce, that now, as the fish ran, slowly, inexorably, I knew that I must give line, that the fish would take those last fifty yards. That which happened then saved me the fish, but lost me the record which I suppose I could otherwise have claimed. The old man, who saw my desperation, seized the line in his steely old hands, added their power to mine; I gained a yard or two, broke that first slow rush. *Altair* was coming up.

The shark plunged again, plunged with a fearful deep power that jerked the rod back against my leg as I sat in the small square hole. The rod was jammed immovably against my leg. I tried to twist it free, to turn the rod, but the rod dragged harder, pulled by that awful power. My leg must break soon. *Altair* was near now. My leg seemed already breaking, and then my frantic effort had freed it and, in the way that dreams have, I was aboard *Altair* by a volition I did not know. Now I was in the fighting chair and someone was struggling to pass through the bolting pin that secures the rod butt in the gymbal.

What followed has become for me something without dimension, something of no specific period, an endless haze of vast and painful struggle







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pierced by sudden sharp illuminations of memory. *Altair* was drifting out, coming out from the shelter of the island into the constantly heavier wallow of the seas and, recurrently, the rain came, violent rain that beat through to the skin. Through the dreamlike painful continuance the constant thread was the consciousness that I must not let the fish have one yard of line that I could keep, that I must gain line, take it in inches and feet back on to the reel. I knew that if I could lift the fish by these arduously stolen gains till change of pressure became my ally, then I could have the beating of it. I pumped, straining back nearly to the horizontal, gaining a yard or so, and then the shark would answer as desperately as I strove myself, boring away, and I, having turned back the star drag to maximum, would be wrenched half out of the chair before I could ease off the drag. Then I would use the whole frantic thrust of my legs against the gunwale, fighting against the yielding of line. But sometimes the enormous weight below would not be denied, and line would go in a thin squeal of protest till, with the strength of anxiety, I could stop it.

It became something endless, something I could not remember ever having started, something I could not think would ever stop; I had always been fighting this shark and always would be fighting it. Then suddenly there came a time, as there does in such things, when like an unexpected light the knowledge was there that a stage had been passed, there could be an end, I could beat this shark. That, seen in retrospect, must have been that time when I had indeed raised the fish enough for change of pressure to begin to impinge. But still, when I looked at the reel, there seemed so big a space still to fill with line; and there was fire in muscles and back, a searing cracking pain of stress. The surges and plunges of the shark and the pitching of *Altair* in the sullen heave of the seas had thrown me so heavily and continuously against the arms of the fighting chair that I could not have sworn that any part of me was whole.

But a moment came, one never to be forgotten, unforgettable and unexpected, when, thirty yards from the boat, a knot showed above the surface. *That* was the knot of the double, that length of line that is doubled for strength immediately above the trace. Then, incredibly, there was the trace itself, first the top swivel then the rest. Now came that awful and wonderful moment, engraved on memory; there came the head of the shark itself, and I can remember that in that moment I could hardly bring myself to believe the width of it, that awesome width, and in it the strangely large eye, emerald green, seeming to stare with demoniac hostility straight into my eye. The vast fish was rolling, thrashing in the surface. The end was near—though indeed I could not say how long those final events took.

I had drawn the shark to the boat, the gaff had gone home and a rope was

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round the huge girth. I knew that there was a wild excitement in the boat, that as I lay back in the chair exhausted, men were milling round me, over me it seemed. From hooking to surfacing, I was to learn, had taken two hours.

I was tired now, but triumphant, passive in the tumult that was a noisy haze. Soon we were into Machico, and there on the quay was the whole population. There was singing, shouting; small dark men swarmed on the boat and endless dark hands seized mine. Then all the men, about forty I think, manned a rope and, singing in unison, heaved on the shark till it was pulled up the stone steps and could be rolled into the well of the boat. Now, as we steamed back to Funchal, there was an air of festival aboard. Brandy was produced, and was gone.

At Funchal there was a great crowd, noise, and of that I remember little. But I remember what the fish weighed, and that weight, after a loss from bleeding of probably a hundred pounds, was 1500 pounds. Next day, I was black and blue, almost too stiff to move.

That then is the story of my great shark, and the tailpiece to it is that, very nearly, it was not mine. The trace, that very heavy steel trace, was nearly bitten through as the first one had been. When the huge fish was finally secured there were a few strands of the steel cable still unsevered. Those saw-like lower teeth, grinding against the conical teeth of the upper jaw, had almost done their work. I saw afterwards, too, why I had thought there was still so much line to take back on the reel when the fish was nearly to the surface. The long fight had so tightened the line on the spool, so contracted it, that it was like stone to the touch.



*We are too apt to judge all creatures by our human standards, to anthropomorphise, which is the wrong way to arrive at a true picture of things. For instance, the salmon has, in his lateral line, something we do not possess and find difficult therefore to understand. He can run a rocky river at night and never touch an obstacle, for every change of current reacts on the little gas-filled cells in that lateral line and he is guided in the right direction. This is almost a type of radar which the fish carries with him. What other mysterious powers of sensitivity he may have we can only surmise, but let us not underestimate the possibilities.*

MY WAY WITH SALMON, by Ian Wood

ERIC HORSFALL TURNER

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*Ben Blyth, Fisherman*

ERIC HORSFALL TURNER, Town Clerk of Scarborough, is one of England's most eminent all-round anglers, a frank and fearless commentator on the angling scene, an editor and annalist of distinction.



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ERIC HORSFALL TURNER

THE RIVERS came tumbling off the mountains of the West. They held trout in those days, thousands of trout. There were great anglers in the villages of the mountains; greater by far, depending how you look at fishing, than the ink-fingery scribes who turned the catching of trout into schemes of complexity and contention.

They used to say of old Ben Blyth that he could spit on a stone, take five paces backwards, throw his fly in the spit—and catch a trout!

We never saw him do that. But between catching the minnows and the stone-loaches, we stalked Ben among the rough jungles of the river-sides. His long fly-rod was more often bent than in repose. He was a gentle caster, laying his team of flies like silk across the sparkling waters; but he was violent and hard on the hooked fish.

To us, scrubby youngsters, Ben was the king.

Gut-an'-'ooks, as we called them, were tuppence each at the local iron-monger's. Flies-to-gut were there too, at a penny-halfpenny apiece; but they came later. First and foremost we had to graduate from the minnows to the trout. The worm, in a river clearing after spate, was the deadliest means—or the dead minnow, tumbled downstream through the amber waters.

We learned the signs of the seasons and the skies. We found the smooth gravel strands among the rocks of the rivers, where the running worm or the minnow took trout after trout. We learned the lies of the fish in the rapids,

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where the broken water masked our presence and the fish banged heavily on the bait. We learned, above all, the thrilling tug-tug of the taking trout.

Now and then we felt a different tug. Then we learned to wait, with pounding nerves. At the raising of our clumsy rods the line hissed through the water and we scrambled madly after the fish. Sometimes we beached it half an hour later. More often it broke our rotten gut, or tore away our braided cotton line. When we beached it, we killed it quickly. We knew nothing of kippers or springers or kelts—or the life-cycle of the salmon. It was just a great silver fish: a salmon—to be taken home cautiously, since our licences were only for trout.

We were wild things.

We caught wild things in a wild world, for the wild joy of the chase. It was the fish. Always, the fish!

The spates did not come every day, leaving the long runs of a clearing river to conceal our presence from the trout. Ben Blyth caught trout with flies. We discovered them at the ironmonger's: blue quill, March brown, coch-y-bonddu and red spinner. If we threw them in the right places on the clear waters of summer, the swirls came and the line tightened.

Now and then we found a big trout, unresponsive to our wet lures, fanning gently in an eddy where the fly could be held for a second or two before the current jerked it clear. Then we dried the point fly with a handkerchief—and played the chalk stream game!

We had never heard of the pundits of the past: the routine anglers, the formalists and the Halfords. We had never seen a journal or a book on fishing. If we had seen them, we should not have understood them. We knew our flies took fish. Sometimes the trout showed preference for one; sometimes for another. Sometimes they took every fly on the leader with gay abandon—and at others they rose everywhere, but would have none of our bundles of feather, quill and fur.

One cannot live long with rivers and fail to see the insect life; or stifle the inquisitiveness bred by the preferences of trout. Long before our young minds were tangled with logarithms, we watched the trout take the naturals. If the sedge was taken with a lively splash, we knew that our March brown would probably be taken too. But not always. And if one trout took it, many more would take as well. If one of the delicate up-wing flies disappeared in a gentle ring, we knew the blue quill or the red spinner might be taken too—but not always. As for the coch-y-bonddu, the black and silver and several others, there were means and methods and days.

Was this the "imitation" about which, even then, the ink-fingery scribes had written so many thousands of words? They talked of exactness and precision. We neither read nor thought of such complexities in the catching of

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the trout with flies. Our flies were means to an end: the end of the swirl, the bending rod, and breathless minutes till the fish was ours—or broke away. They would have been hard put to it, those ink-fingery pundits, to keep up with us in those mountain wastes, when the creel was tipped up at close of day. We liked to think we could catch as many as Ben Blyth, by then with his fathers in the little graveyard by the top weir pool. And he had been the king!

If the trout were difficult and defied every trick our ingenuity devised, we fished on persistently. Sometimes the mood of the trout changed suddenly. Then the creel-strap bit into the shoulder on the homeward trek through the jungles of the untended valleys.

But if the trout remained obdurate, that was the day that was. We grunted our way home without a breath of enjoyment in the clear air; without a thought for the sparkling beauty of the valleys; without a glance at the moon and stars which often shone through the warm night as we clambered from the dusky jungles to the tracks across the hill.

We were wild things.

When we could catch no wild things in a wild world, the joy of the chase became a frustrated hope of the past.

Yet even then there had been a subtle change. We rarely turned to worm and spinner. The thrill of the tugging trout had ceased to be the top. Now and then we may have sensed it with a faint sadness: "Thou minds me o' departed joys, departed—never to return!"

That was a great country. There was terrific vitality in the clear mountain air; there was a dank but majestic desolation over the upland marshes; there were the winds that sighed through the tangled branches above us as we fished amid the green leaves of the spring; there was the sunlight and the shadow that danced on the bright waters as they clattered and splashed through the hot spells of summer; there were the mists of dawn and dusk which crept up the deep valleys in the shortening days of autumn, to be swept away from the thundering pools in the wild storms of the equinox.

There are times when a depressing sense of finality comes upon us; a forecast rather than a remembrance.

We had fished through a superb July and August. Brief mountain rains had kept the water to a fine level and the rises were continual, with the bigger trout at their most active. My companion was a silent fellow. We spoke little of our sport. Once we had reached our starting place up the valleys, we became solitary anglers, meeting only at dusk to find our way home.

But our thoughts were the same and our catches differed little.



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"This ends tomorrow", he said in the gathering dusk of early September, "I am for the cities tomorrow."

Though I had said nothing, I was for the cities too. By chance our lodgings among the stench and turmoil of the black sprawls of the north were close together. But it was still the fish! We planned our strategy and found a guide.

Our guide was an elderly relation. He had fished a lifetime, often with Jim Bazley, and knew his game from the barbel to the roach, and the pike to the trout and grayling. Excepting the trout, these fish were new to us; but our guide was also a great one for the fish, showing up our clumsy inexperience with catches beyond belief.

We fished the mill dams for the roach, the perch and the small carp; we sat on our tackle-boxes by the stagnant canals where the bites were rare, the eels predominated and a six-inch gudgeon was a monster. Occasionally, at dawn, we went up some river of the fells, fishing for trout until the hikers came at noon. The fly hatches were poor on those cheap waters; and the trout, ground-baited and spun to dementia, took rare interest in our morsels of feather and fur. But they would take the dead minnow tumbled through the faster shallows. For brief periods we turned to the tricks of our childhood, to take catches which raised the bushy eyebrows of our guide.

Once or twice, out of curiosity, we clambered on coaches with t'lads of t'mills. Then we found our pegs and fished the day out, watching our floats with the fierce concentration of the cat that watches the mouse-hole. We felt no great elation in beating the next man; nor even a wish to beat the field. Nor had the day of the specimen come with its hot headline in 36-point above a grinning face, a big fish—and the assurance that the big fish had been returned for repetition of the drill.

These games, for us, were *lifeless caricatures* of the wild fishing of the mountains.

Ben Blyth remained the king. But behind him a background began to show faintly through the smog of the cities; a background of mountain grandeur, glittering valleys and sparkling cascades. The fish had dropped, a fraction, in importance.

There is little difference, to the casual observer, between the black sprawls of the north and the blacker midland sprawls to which we drifted. But there is a difference among anglers. In the north we met the trout fishers of the fells; men with a simplicity and directness not unlike our own. The rivers were fast. The trout were there to be caught with the lightly dressed flies they were known to take.

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In the midlands, where the trout rivers were slow and distant, we met a fly-fisher of a different kind: a fly-fisher without fish. These pleasant fellows fished by the calendar. They could not reach for the rod when the water looked good, or when the mood seized them. They made the fishing of their calendar days an intricate science, maybe as compensation! They talked a lingo of their own, in which our traditional flies did not seem to find a place; nor, for that matter, our method of going for the trout with flies they would take.

The science of these fly-fishers was not confined to the lingo. Their massive libraries were lined with tomes which explained—perhaps!—the innumerable complexities faced by the fly-fisher for trout, from presentation to the *perlidae*, and from *taeniopteryx nebulosa* to the kidney-shaped whorls. The tomes were read, marked and learned with fierce intensity. Discussion drifted into the small hours. They had their own customs and their own kings, these fly-fishers of the straggling midland sprawl.

A young man can only listen in a strange land. First he must learn the language; then understanding comes slowly. The trout were far away and expensive, except for the reservoirs; but my companion and I had tried those and could find no life in the tedious slashing. For lack of better things to do, we learned the language of our neighbours and examined their customs and kings with care—but no conviction. Ben Blyth remained our king, his throne strengthened in its solid simplicity and unshaken by the thousand imponderable complexities raised by the lords of the chalk streams and their admirers of the midlands.

With us, it was still the fish, always the fish.

But then, it started as the fish. There were so many who had started without the fish. A day with one of them sticks in the mind.

All morning the trout took the hatching nymphs. The floating fly was useless. But the simple blue quill of the mountains, drifted an inch or two below the surface, took a reasonable catch. When we joined for lunch my host admitted a blank—and looked at my catch with surprised horror.

“What did you get those on?”

I showed him the fly and told him the method.

“Ah!”, he said in solemn rebuke, “We don’t use the wet fly here.”

“But they weren’t taking the duns—only the hatching nymphs. What d’you do then?”

He shrugged his shoulders.

In the late afternoon they came on the spinners and took a pheasant tail freely. He caught one or two and seemed to be in better frame of mind. But he never invited me to his water again. I was a savage among the civilized! In passing, this host of mine had been catching the occasional trout on fly for

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two years, against my thousands in twelve. But the doctrine, for lack of the rivers and the trout, had soused him deeply.

It was always the doctrine, never the fish!

The salmon fishing of the cities was in strange contrast. Even in those days the rents were high in the north and west; and the salmon were hard cash. "Get 'em at all costs!", was the unspoken law. Now and then I heard guest anglers complain that they had been driven from the lodge to fish. This was no hardship to us, to whom it was still the fish. We were ready to camp on an iceberg if the splash of a showing salmon betrayed the presence of others. We looked only for the drivers from the lodge.

The drivers looked for those who needed no driving. Questions were few. The criterion was the silver corpses on the bank. The deadly worm technique of the mountains had its uses once again.

It kept us with our fish!

There were no real finalities in this era of our fishing; because there was nothing to finalise. But there were trends of thought and preference.

During our fishing in the mountains on brief holidays we detected no change—except that the fixed-spool reel was in far too many hands, more numerous hands by far than we had known in earlier days, and the trout were much fewer. The speakers of the lingo were entitled to their own tenets. You can only derive full enjoyment from any game; and if you choose a complication and a strange lingo to achieve it, who should say it is wrong—so long as it is not proclaimed dogmatically as the *only* way? The salmon, though exciting, were moody and unpredictable. They could never rival the trout—which were always there, and often predictable to those who knew the game. Indeed, the trout showed a tendency to become more interesting in their obdurate moods; and the figure of Ben Blyth became more shadowy against the strengthening background of the mountains and the valleys.

There only remained the adventure of the biggest fish.

Deep in the blood of every angler who started with the fish there lurks the urge to catch the biggest. The skill and essence of the game does not cross the mind: it is alone the length and girth and fighting power. But the big fish are the costly ones to catch.

However, chance and inclination play their part.

On a September evening after the war, we watched the winking lights of Scarborough disappear over a humping sea. Now and then a gull wheeled like a silent phantom through the glow of the deck lights. A vast herring-hog slid over alongside with a hissing sigh. We moved steadily north-east, the splendid desolation of the midnight sea broken only by the monotonous thud of the engines and the crash of the falling bows.

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Did we feel these things? I doubt it. The wildness of the chase was still there, running deep in the bloodstream. We had never caught the biggest—and it was still the fish.

For two hours we ran alongside the hauling drifters. It became a dull repetition; a ten minute pause while we gazed over the gunwales into the blackness looking for the cloudy shapes that were not there. We left the crew to search and went below to cat-nap into the dawn. The chorus came suddenly from aloft, "Tunnyfish! tunnyfish!"

We scrambled from our bunks, tossed for the rod, and went over into the dinghy which jolted alongside on the flattening sea. Below us we could see the tunny—one, two, three, four—sweeping majestically in glows of phosphorescence.

This was the moment: the greatest of them all.

The bait went over and the wait began.

Then the rod tip went down with terrific force—and came up with the heave of a tug-of-war. The boatman strained on his oars to get clear of the drifter's nets. The reel clattered into a hoarse scream.

We gathered way as the great fish towed us south, then east. The drifter finished her haul and raised anchor. We saw her lights disappear to the west as she moved to the morning markets. Our own power craft stood well away. We were alone in the blackness; and fighting below us, with a dour incredible violence, was the biggest of them all.

The tunny wastes no energy in the spectacular tail-skitters of the marlin. It is down, down, always down. The line lashed into the darkness like the fiery track of a tracer bullet. The fight pounded on. Give a few yards . . . take a few. Heave him up . . . let him go, because you cannot stop him. But always it was a little more that came in and a little less that went out.

Three hundred yards of line take time to recover against such pressure. The rim of the world began to show in the east. There was an indigo tinge in the blackness around us. The fire, the water-burn as the fishermen call it, went from the line. But the struggle went on and the aching exhaustion of the prize-ring crept into mind and muscles.

The dawn was spreading. The gently swelling sea tinged with pink. Our power craft crept closer as a swirling boil showed occasionally. The end was near.

We caught that fish; all 600 lb. of it. But in the reflective aftermath of thought, it was a finality of finalities.

It was the greatest and most powerful. But the hook did not lose its hold; and there had been the whole North Sea in which to tire it. What was so wonderful about the catch? From the moment of hooking to the time it slid

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alongside the dinghy, dead, with the dusky rainbow glow over its length and girth in the pale dawn light, it had been ours.

Was this the be-all and end-all of fishing? Must it be the fish, always the fish?

My companion passed out of my ken soon after the chase for tunny. He went to the north of New Zealand, where the waters of Taupo and Rotorua hold the biggest trout in the world. I hear from him now and then—a very happy angler. For him, it is still the fish, always the fish; as it is with innumerable anglers in that part of the southern hemisphere.

I didn't feel the loss of his company severely at the time. We had kept company because our tastes and philosophies had been the same. Even over the tunny, as we moved to port across the pale green September seas, we had nodded agreement: that fish had been no test of angling skill—nor, unless the hook slipped from its parrot-like jaws, had it stood a chance of escape from any angler who understood the technique of tiring a heavy fish.

But with the drift of the relentless years, the loss was sensed more deeply—sensed with reflective amusement, tinged with sadness.

There remains, deep down, a faint tension as trout or salmon tug gently at the worm; a faint thrill as they hit the spinner hard. There is still a gentle satisfaction in the swirl and tightening line when the trout takes the wet fly beneath a broken water surface. Even the tunny, for a brief span, held a fading attraction in a slowly changing scene.

But the violence of the thrill had gone from these things.

Fortunately for the human race, we live for the day. Only in brief spasms of reflection on the past do we sense a tinge of sadness in the thoughts of vanished joys. And angling, far beyond all other games, lives with a man for all his life. The longer the rod is in his hand, the more he can see of the endless field of possibility; and the further into the mists of distance moves the horizon of perfection and true finality.

The simple Ben Blyth, fisherman, was the hero of our boyhood days. He was the king; and for all that his figure grew more shadowy over the passing years, his stature never shrank.

We met other kings in our wanderings round the angling world. They were not all kings we liked; and their veneration was often a complex ritual born of the vanity of their followers, rather than a child of logic and reason. But among these kings, lesser kings to us, there were great thinkers in their own right. They were sincere. They believed that they had seen problems which none had seen before. The problems were challenges; and they wrestled endlessly with them to death. Maybe, though nothing is certain in angling, their wrestlings have conferred some benefit to the wide world of angling.

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At the least, they gave a lead to the potential of perfection; and showed that the way of catching fish can be more important, in a sense, than merely catching fish. At the most, they may have helped to replace the declining thrills of youth with wider and more lasting interests.

Fly-dressing is no longer the construction of things of feather and fur that trout will take; but a game in which the fly-bench and the naturals develop a new relationship, a speculative affinity which can outlast the angling life of any man. It is a private affinity at its best; a matter between the angler and his trout, rather than one to be noised abroad in postulates and dogma. The scribbings of the self-elevated technicians of affinity may be of passing interest; but for every scribe of angling, there are many quiet men who play with this affinity incessantly. Who knows? Many such a one may be far ahead of any scribe of by-gone years!

The cast is no longer the casual picking of rod and roughly-balanced line, to throw flies carelessly in the vicinity of the rising trout. The perfection of presentation is known; and for all the skill of Ben Blyth which caught him many a thousand trout with his rough tackle and downstream cast, the lesser kings have shown us better and more varied ways.

Moreover, there are many moments of unspoken triumph in the struggle for perfections we can only see in outline. It may be the accurate selection of this fly or that, designed and dressed for the situation, which brings the trout to it without pause. Again, it may be the gentle, accurate upstream cast which lays the fly to an inch or so to drift into the vision of the rising trout of the clear chalk stream.

Ben Blyth joined his fathers in an obscure and distant past. My companion of earlier years, if he ever lived at all, enjoys his wild life as he snares and fights the great trout of the antipodes, with the long-feathered fish-lures of those lands.

Shorn of king and companion, angling remains for me as it started: the fish, always the fish.

Only the settings, the horizons and the symphony have altered.



*Let us, then, live and let live, remembering that, whether we fish for trout with a dry fly, for salmon with a golden sprat, or for minnows with a bent pin, we are all fellow-members of an ancient brotherhood, which until quite recent times was untroubled by schisms and petty jealousies. And instead of tilting against each other, let us unite in combat against those who, by polluting, poaching, or extracting water from our streams, threaten our sport with extinction.*

RIVERSIDE REFLECTIONS, by C. F. Walker



WILLIAM B. CURRIE

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*Grayling at Midnight*



WILLIAM B. CURRIE is a lecturer in English by profession and an angler, traveller and writer by compulsion. He is editor of *Rod and Line*, which he launched in 1962; has written five books on fishing and edited twice that number. Has made several trips to Finnish Lapland to assess its game fishing possibilities. Serves on numerous committees concerned with opening up and developing the game fishing of his native Scotland. Married, lives in Edinburgh, lectures in Glasgow; fishes farther afield, perhaps, than any contributor to this book except Bernard Venables.



## *Grayling at Midnight*

WILLIAM B. CURRIE

IF YOU HAVE a romantic streak and the kind of mind that likes metaphors, Finland can be thought of as a dancer. Suspend your disbelief; look at the map of the Baltic and half close your eyes. She is a dancer caught by the shutter of our imagination as she spins round towards the west. Her skirts billow out in a rich archipelago and on her full kirtle lakes glitter like sequins. Lapland is her head and to the extreme north-west a single arm is raised. At its very tip, where Finland, Sweden and Norway meet, lies a tract of superb fell country through whose interior runs the river I came to know as "Uncle Reindeer".

Our starting out point was the frontier post of Kilpisjärvi and, with the man from the post office, and his horse to carry our heavier equipment, we set out on the long walk from the comparative civilisation of the frontier post to the headwaters of the Lätäseno river, which is called in Lappish, Poroeno. In a jocular and affectionate way this can be mistranslated as "Uncle Reindeer", and so it became known by Erkki, Maatti and me. It was seventeen hours' walk from the frontier, and was as near virgin fishing as one could find on this side of paradise.

The interior of Lapland in July glitters like glass. The sub-tundra of the high fells is composed of greyish and yellow moss which the sudden summer has crisped in the sun. Stones of schists and granites streaked with quartz catch the glare and at times you could swear there was a city ahead flashing

## Grayling at Midnight

its glass panes at you as you walked. Our way was through a wilderness, but to any angler a wilderness with dozens of little lakes, and brawling mountain streams is a contradiction in terms. We walked with a fly-rod mounted and as we arrived at each thigh-deep rocky stream we fished, then forded it. We took a dozen or so of the deep red belliced char the Finns call *rauto*. It was tempting to call off the march for an hour or two and make a basket of these beautiful fish, with their tomato red bellies and exquisite fins piped in cream. Convincing ourselves that these were the lesser glories, we contented ourselves with samples of the wild char fishing of the fells and forged on.

We walked with coffee stops every two hours and the line of four men and a horse often straggled out over the bleak high tundra. One had the feeling of walking alone in the interior of a land which no man had trod. Thick wedges of snow appeared as we rose and fingers of streams chattered out from their melting edges. It was incredible to see char as long as one's middle finger hovering in the streams below the snow. It was elemental. "And behold there was a river born from the snow, and in the river were fish."

When we at last saw the glimmer of the lake at Miekonjärvi, where the waters of "Uncle Reindeer" flowed, we quickened our pace. In an hour's time we reached its shores, a peaceful clear lake in a well scoured valley between high fells. My watch declared that it was one a.m. but the midnight sun glowed red down the course of the pounding river flowing into the head of the lake. Suppressing the urge to fish at once, we pitched our tent and slept for five hours as one can only sleep after twenty-seven miles of walking.

I fished the river at once when I woke using my little eight-and-a-half foot fly-rod and a team of three trout flies that I happened to have handy, on four pound nylon. Second cast, the stream I fished divided; there was a fierce tug and all three flies were lost in a fish which had viciously risen to me. I fished around in my bag pulled out a six pound cast and began again. This time I rose a fish almost at once and hooked it well, but before I could play it out another fish took a dropper and smashed the cast again. What in all the world *were* they? I knew what species to expect, but from the nature of the takes I could not see whether trout, char or grayling had risen to me.

The next cast I put on solved at least one of my problems. It was a sea trout cast of eight pounds strain with two size eight flies attached. This time I hooked and played and landed a grayling of about two and a half pounds. It came in towards the net with its elaborate dorsal fin erect and its rounded pectorals planing in the stream. In fast water a sail and two planing fins makes the grayling a very hard fish indeed to beat. I was to grow in respect for the fighting powers of grayling as I got to know the waters of "Uncle Reindeer".

That morning we all killed a bag of big grayling but from one stream I

## *Grayling at Midnight*

took three trout running up to about a pound and a half. The trout were easier to kill, although harder to rise. Our biggest grayling from that particular area weighed three-and-a-half pounds and it took a tiny dry-fly at midnight, on a very fine nylon leader of two pounds strain. It took twenty minutes to bring it in and even then I netted it by luck as it swam past, with all fins erect like a ship in full sail. I could have killed a salmon in the same time and with less trouble. Trout and salmon are torpedoes and they run hard in a fight; grayling tend to plane down into the water and where there is enough stream, they use the force in a much more subtle way than trout do.

We moved down to another rapid some four miles off and there we set up a base camp from which we radiated to fish likely water within ten miles' walk. The best fishing of the river, it turned out, was not far away at all; it was in the rapid beside our tent site. There the river poured out of another lake, Porojärvi, and with channels of brilliant sand and round pebble bars across it, several magnificent, deep pools were formed, in which the finest grayling I have ever seen rose all day long to flies. They were perhaps the finest grayling in Finland, and that is another way of saying the finest in Europe.

I waded out over a stony bar below which the river broke into thirteen streams and fanned into a deep sandy hole. I had learned by this time to fish in a special way for these magnificent grayling, some of which rose like salmon in the pools. I fished a ten foot two-piece Walker Bampton fly-rod and an eight pound sea trout cast. On this were mounted two flies, a size eight double Grey Monkey on the tail and a single size eight dropper fly which I changed as whim took me.

These flies I fished as if salmon were my quarry. Sinking them well, I made them trundle slowly down over the sand which rippled below the streams. Grayling would rise to smaller flies, but the biggest fish seldom troubled to come up through the stream to such a tiny morsel. They seemed to find the Arctic shrimps, and such insect larvae as there were, best taken at depth. My "salmon" methods were probably almost "intuitive" deep nymphing methods, learned by experience. At any rate, they worked brilliantly.

I took a grayling out of each stream from the first seven of the runs breaking below the bar of stones on which I waded. The best of them was three-and-a-half pounds, the smallest over two-and-a-half. My bag was painfully full and severely impeding my wading, but, being so far out over the bar, I decided to fish one more stream. Leaning heavily on my landing net handle I waded forward and cast out over the eighth stream. I had a strong take almost at once, and the fish pulled hard and took line in a way that no other fish had done on this river. The rod bent wildly and the reel continued to

## *Grayling at Midnight*

give line in fierce hard bursts. What in all Lapland had I hooked! At that time the European record grayling was standing at a little over seven pounds. This fish felt at least of that calibre. Hampered as I was with a bulging bag I fought this fish as if all my journey had been made specially for it and as if all the other grayling fishing had been in the nature of an apprenticeship.

Erkki saw it all from the bank behind me, but there was nothing he could do to help. He was not wading. I don't think I wanted help anyway. This was a sort of personal conquest. As the fish alternately took line and settled to dour, hard pulling I began to wonder about its behaviour. There was a strange pulsing in this fight which I had never experienced before. Was it a grayling at all, or some Arctic specimen unheard-of and as yet unhooked? At that thought I played the fish a little more gingerly.

At last the rod pressure weakened the fish and I began to win back line. The fish was now in the stream below me, and, wading out into the sandy eddy by the stream, I prepared to edge it into the net. I cautiously eased line back and caught the first glimpse of my fish. I thought my eyes were deceiving me, for there was only a grayling of some three pounds showing, firmly hooked on the dropper. Then I realised that I had another fish and a much better one, on the tail fly. It flashed deep in the stream behind the now-exhausted three-pounder.

In Scotland, when two fish are hooked together on a loch, one nets the tail fish first. Rules, I thought, are meant to be obeyed. Try as I might, however, I could not get the larger fish near me while the dropper-hooked grayling was still attached. I tried twice but made nothing of it. There was nothing to do but net the three pounder and hope that the fish on the tail fly would also come quietly. I drew the fish nearer and slipped my net under it. All went well until the dropper hook, protruding through the tough upper lip of the grayling snagged the meshes of the net. Hell's teeth! The smaller fish was half way down the bag of the net, the dropper hook was snagged and, two yards off, at the end of the nylon cast was the shadowy form of a superb grayling which could take off at any moment and smash everything.

Tucking the net handle under my left arm I drew out my sheath knife and with a single quick movement cut the dropper through between the snagged grayling and the net. The cast twanged out of the net like a guitar string, and the larger grayling, which had been so docile during the critical operation, sped off again into the stream. After that it was routine playing and netting to bring a splendid grayling of just over four pounds into the net beside the still-snagged fish hooked on the dropper. Seven-and-a-bit pounds of grayling at one go, played out in the middle of a fast river three hundred miles above the Arctic Circle. In one body the two fish would have been equal to the record. In two it seemed to be worth an award category on its own.



*"At Lapland's very tip, where Finland, Sweden and Norway meet, lies a tract of superb country through which runs the river I came to know as 'Uncle Reindeer'."*

*Kuopulainen was one of the characters whom William B. Currie met on his fishing journey in the wilderness of Finnish Lapland*



*Nigel Drake of West Kensington, 14 years old when this picture was taken, typifies the young enthusiast Though seen here fishing the Serpentine, he regularly cycled 60 to 70 miles to fish, as a member of the Oxford and Cambridge Angling Society*



*Children's fishing competition at the lake in Grovelands Park, Southgate, London, organised by Palmers Green Angling Society and Borough of Southgate*



## *Grayling at Midnight*

I staggered ashore with my nine fish weighing just over twenty-seven pounds in all. The fishing had taken one hour, and it remains in my mind as perhaps the finest hour of my fishing career.

As so often happens in a moment of heightened experience, a detail sticks vividly. I remember wading ashore and reflecting on the magnificence of the blood knot which can form a dropper yet hold splendidly firm during the fight under pressure from two different directions.

In three days' fishing in that area we caught over two hundred pounds of grayling, char and trout. I had forty-six fish over a kilo in three days, all on fly. "Uncle Reindeer" was showing his resources. I suppose it was a kind of reward for a long journey to fish his waters. I was the first British angler ever to go there, and certainly the first fly-fisher.

This is really only a small part of a much longer story. We made a rendezvous with a backwoodsman who knew the Lapps, and through his good offices we hired a long black Lapp boat and made the journey down Poroeno and Lättseno to a point about a hundred miles down, where we reached a road. We shot innumerable rapids, made agonising portages and wallowed in the pleasure-and-pain experience of pioneering. The boat was drawn ashore at the road and later that month a lorry carried it back to Kilpisjärvi, our starting point. There it lay until the snows came again and the Lapps who had hired it to us sent a reindeer team to draw it over the fells again to their camp site beside "Uncle Reindeer".

**POSTSCRIPT:** Finland is not far off if you fly. Finnair fly from London to Helsinki in about four hours and the fare is somewhere in the region of £75 return. You can also sail direct to Helsinki or travel over Sweden and sail across the Baltic for about £40 return. From Helsinki, if you can tear yourself away from such a splendid city, you can fly by the Finnair domestic flights to such centres in Lapland as Rovaniemi and Ivalo, for about £10 single. Rovaniemi is the capital of Lapland, and from this centre several far-northern routes fan out on which mail coaches operate. To reach Kilpisjärvi tourist inn for example, one travels a whole day by coach through Muonio and the thinning forest to the splendid fell country around the frontiers of Finland, Sweden and Norway.

Travel to the finest of the fishing in Lapland is always done under one's own initiative, either by walking, hiring a Lapp guide with a boat to sail you to the interior, or in recent years, by hiring a small seaplane to take you to a remote lake from which the fishing of the interior is explored. One may sometimes, in the interior, find splendid uninhabited refuge huts in which a short stay can be made; but generally a tent is called for. Take all your food



## Grayling at Midnight

to the interior, and study how to survive! Most of all, don't forget mosquito oil. Lapland can produce all too many of these insects in summer.

The Finnish Tourist Association has leaflets and other information about Lapland, some specifically on the fishing. Their address is Finnish Travel Information Centre, Finland House, 56 Haymarket, London S.W.1.



"Ministers! Always saying they're getting a call from the Lord, but it's always a call for a better job! D'ye know the set about the Minister and his bicycle?" said Red Rob. "Ach, well, it was this way. There was a Minister who was always going about his parish on a bicycle, and one Sunday he couldn't find it at all, so when he came up to the church he said to the beadle 'My bicycle is away and I'm thinking someone must have taken it'. 'Could it be one of the congregation?' said the beadle. 'Well,' said the Minister, 'it might be, for there's not many of them that I would put it past to take the lend of a bicycle and maybe never give it back.' 'Well,' said the beadle, 'I tell you what we'll do. You will prepare a sermon on the Ten Commandments and this very next Sabbath you will give this sermon and you will be on the watch, and I will be on the watch, and when it comes to the Commandment 'Thou shalt not steal' we will be keeping our eyes open to see which one of the congregation has taken the bicycle and I think we will find it that way.'" So the Minister thought he would do just that and he went home and started to prepare his sermon. And so it came round to Sunday again and he got up into the pulpit, and there was the beadle looking out to see could he catch the man who had taken the bicycle. But when it came to the sermon, the Minister never preached yon one at all, but just one of his ordinary sermons. So after it was over, the beadle said to him, "How at all did you not preach yon sermon we had agreed upon?" and the Minister said, "Well, I was going over the Commandments and when I came to the Commandment 'Thou shalt not commit adultery', I remembered where I had left my bicycle'."

MEN AND HERRING, by Naomi Mitchison and Denis Macintosh

*In the gravel of the moorland stream the eggs were hatching, little fish breaking from confining skins to seek life, each one alone, save for the friend of all, the Spirit of the waters. And the star-stream of heaven flowed westward, to far beyond the ocean where salmon, moving from deep water to the shallows of the islands, leapt—eager for immortality.*

SALAR THE SALMON, by Henry Williamson

WILL NICKLESS

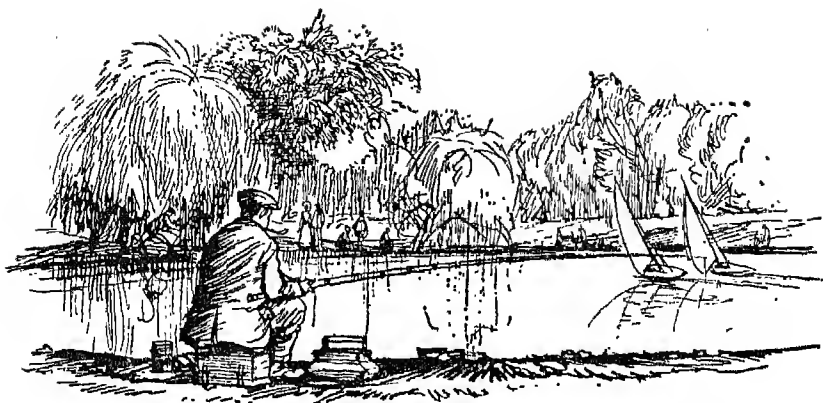
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*The Third Pond*

WILL NICKLESS, who illustrated this volume, is a many-sided man. He is a professional artist but much besides. For many years he did technical drawings for *The Motor* and other publications; he is, indeed, a superlatively gifted mechanic, who can and does tackle such daunting jobs as re-boring his vintage Rolls-Royce. He makes violins and flutes, miniature locomotives that work; has constructed a beautiful telescope. He does illustrations for books, magazines and newspapers, but also paints for pleasure. Is an accomplished and profound student of mysticism and philosophy, and author of *Owlglass*, a remarkable fantasy for children of all ages. Lives in a withdrawn and lovely old house in Sussex where deer sometimes raid the vegetable garden, and the sound of the radio has never been heard.



## *The Third Pond*

WILL NICKLESS

THREE-*HA'PENCE* was the price of the complete outfit. The delight-giving, the gloated-over part, was of course the float tackle, and this at a penny accounted for two thirds of the cost. The shop in which I spent this sum, which I can assure you was by no means a sum to be despised only fifty years ago, was in the Alcroft Rd., N.W., kept by a tall and faded lady who peered at her customers through glasses and through crevices in the mountain range of sweet bottles towering on the congested counter before her.

In spite of the saccharine nature of her surroundings, or perhaps because of them, the bottles as it were having absorbed all there was of that quality in her constitution, she appeared to the small customer as rather soured, and to have told her that she sold the philosopher's stone and the elixir of life at a penny a go would certainly have surprised her. Yet so it was. No pennyworth ever handed over a counter held more magic, or more potential excitement, than did this simple gear. Signing a cheque in Hardy's shop, and taking away a neat little parcel, can still give me a certain pleasure even today, but for the real thing, the genuine magic, one has to be eight or nine years old and invest a penny at the toy counter in a shop in the Alcroft Rd.

You left the shop with a slip of bamboo, a semi-circular section of the cane about six inches long and with the ends steeply bevelled. Wound around it, with the float lying as it were within a little cradle, was the line. This, a yard or so of green or yellow water cord, terminated in the short length of natural gut which carried three split shot and a small hook. This last, being slipped over the bevelled end of the bamboo cradle, point and barb within, formed the anchorage of the tackle. Tangles were impossible, and the hook,

## The Third Pond

being first to go in and last to come off, was, taking into account the malignant nature of hooks, housed in as very near perfect safety as it would be possible to contrive.

But the float, of course, was the high-spot of this pennyworth. I could write for hours about floats. I could exhaust even *your* patience, reader, and you are, presumably, a fisherman and would naturally entertain a high regard for such beautiful things. Floats! The word brings its picture, and I defy any fisherman to conjure it up without at the same time smelling the curious tang of fishing-water, and seeing the endless series of water rings generated by the gentle bobbing of floats. I'm speaking of course, of *real* floats. Not plastic things, moulded by the million, but the old hand-made, lovingly contrived, crafty thing, of cork and quill and thread.

Barrel shaped or round? Well, your penny could command either, but in my experience the two varieties were never in stock together at the same moment; one had to accept, at least in the Alcroft Rd., whichever of the two shapes they happened to have on hand. But as to colour, there was a certain choice. Green-and-white or red-and-white—and, as I hardly need remind you, if one was a born fisherman this variety of choice was ample. Among real fishermen there are, as it were, naturally red men and naturally green men. I am a naturally green man, but not for a moment would I quarrel with the naturally red man, any more than I, having blue eyes, would dispute with a man his right to brown ones. No. But the matter is altogether different when it comes to some of the flamboyant horrors seen on the water today. Plastic, of course; all of them.

You would, I know, scarcely credit it, but I have seen, actually seen *yellow* floats! One man I came across endeavoured to excuse his vulgarity in dabbling with so accursed a thing by telling me, with a hangdog look, that he could see it better in the water. See it better in the water! He told me it was on the same principle as Belisha Beacons, and the illuminations on airfields. I walked away. A man that could use such examples, even in the defence of his own life, was beyond debate. The aesthetic argument could not have touched him. He knew of no more to fishing than catching fish, and so far as this latter went, he would appear to have been pretty well informed, for he had in fact half a dozen fair-sized roach in a keep net. On reflection I imagine that his concern with fishing really was in just catching fish. Of the delights of angling he knew nothing. A drain, with catchable fish in it, would have been water enough for him.

To have tried to explain to him that there were only two combinations of colour in which a float could be painted with propriety would have seemed to his pragmatist mind to border on madness. And yet, as I said, there was indeed a sort of hangdog air of apology about him. As though

## The Third Pond

dimly remembered canons of decent behaviour rose up and choked him before strangers, and that in spite of his keep net. But I'm sorry. This is something of a digression, I'm afraid. We were speaking of floats and their proper colours.

They had also a *proper shape*, and here I am not speaking of the globular versus the barrel-shaped cork body. I speak of the quill and of the slight curve it possessed by nature, and which it introduced into the float. There are, I know, floats of which the lower part, that below the cork body, is of wood, and I have no quarrel with them. But those of the Alcroft Rd. were, apart from the cork, wholly of quill. The very tail of this quill was cleared of its pith and turned back upon itself, and of the aperture so formed a link was made to secure the little brass ring that took the line. The turned-back portion of quill was bound with waxed thread and with a whip finish.

In addition to this beautiful thing one had, thrown in as it were, a line, a gut cast, three split shot and a hook. And furthermore the whole within a split bamboo sweetly shaped, and the cost one penny. . . . Well, how was it done? I imagine, I believe, though I do not actually *know*, that they came from Japan. It was an article of faith, fifty years ago, that the Japanese lived wholly upon rice. What there was about this diet that allowed them to perform economic miracles as a matter of course, was seldom explored. I have since been told that today they allow themselves a little fish, and a bean or so, in addition, and that they now send us the Honda motorcycle . . . a world-beater and as nicely made as the float I speak of.

But we must leave this, for somehow or other I've got to get you to the middle pond, and we cannot even start for it until we have spent the half-penny on the rod. What was it they then called themselves? Italian Warehousemen. That was it. One bought the rod from an Italian Warehouseman. An oil shop, we called it. You may be too young to have known them. There were three great terra cotta jars, variously painted, above the fascia and coupled to the wall above with bars of iron. There, very nearly another digression, but spotted in time, and we're in the shop and have bought the rod.

A simple length of bamboo, about five feet of it. Perfectly plain except for its natural leaf-junctions, that is to say it had none of those peculiar brown blotches on its surface that decorated much of the bamboo used in the popular furniture of the time, "occasional tables" and the like. I've often wondered what possible occasion could have made such a table seem natural, but I'll pass that one by for the moment though I imagine you'll admit that it's a fascinating opening. It was necessary to carefully ring the bamboo at the top with a little groove—a penknife job, a series of little V cuts, within which the line was knotted. Not yet, of course, not indeed until we are at the water; but the rod was made ready, and the jar obtained. . . .

## *The Third Pond*

Yes, the ex-jam jar, the thing that has appeared in thousands of illustrations as a necessary part, an indispensable part, of the equipment of a boy going fishing. It wasn't actually, so far as I personally was concerned, indispensable, as you shall hear. It was rather a nuisance in the carrying, it was useless for anything much larger than a minnow, and there were other ways of transporting fish for short distances. But I generally did take one, and sometimes I even returned with it.

Do you know the Highgate Ponds? Have you, too, been in Arcady? There were, in my time, three of them. This was before the Kenwood ground was added to the Heath, which addition has, I seem to remember, added a fourth pond. But as I say, in my time there were only three. The first pond, although I remember it perfectly, did not seem to have any particular activities attached to it. One *could* fish it. I have seen men doing so. But I never did so myself. It was, I remember, spike-iron-railed, very bushed near the edges, and for some reason it carried an atmosphere of gloom. It was a grey sort of pond. An east-wind pond. I never fished it.

Number two, the middle one, was the swimming pond. There was a high-diving tower, and spring boards and so on, and one didn't fish it. But the third, the third pond was . . . Dear reader, you have fished the Test? the Hampshire Avon near Amesbury? the Itchen? You know something of the Scottish rivers perhaps (which is more than I do, for I never get so far). You know the Lakes in Wales? Well, you may qualify, perhaps. Your takes of salmon may be records (I hope so indeed) and the stuffed job in the hall was actually and truly yours? Even so. But you never did fish the Highgate Pond aged about eight?

Well, of course, I hasten to admit it was no merit in me that I did so. It merely happened to be my local water. Indeed, for years it was my *only* water, and I knew every inch of it. I knew it like I knew the family house or garden. Its margin was a series of little wooden piles, little trimmed logs driven in all round it, and this gave a certain depth to the edge, and added something to its charm. Where a pond shelves out to nothing, as on a sea beach, there is the everlasting worry as to the depth at which one is lying, but this sheathing at the edge always gave a firm footground and the certainty of depth. It also made the pond appear as an ordered thing, and not as merely an enlarged puddle. Rain could and did alter depth (I have seen the tops of the piling awash) but the shape remained constant, and this I then considered was a splendid thing. You knew where you were.

You are still with me? Good. Then we will approach our water as I did fifty years ago, that is from the Parliament Hill side. Our path is a little lower than the level of the pond and so we do not actually see it . . . but . . . er . . . do you notice that rather queer smell? Yes? It's the smell of the Danger Zone,

## *The Third Pond*

or that at least is (I can assure you) what the fish call it. It's the area of water roughly some twelve feet broad that lies at the edge of the pond, the bed of which is composed, or perhaps decomposed would be the better word, of bread paste. No pond in Europe, I suppose, has more customers in the season than the one before us, and as the season advances so does this smell get stronger, and more and more suggests the notion of an old and rotting flour mill that has at last subsided into the water, but has managed to keep its stones going.

I used to think that this was the natural smell of the water, but later years and further experience convinced me that this was not so. It's *old bread paste*, and a few of its latest distributors are already at the pond and contributing their mites there in front of us as we reach the water. Something queer about them, also? Mind you, I didn't think so all that time ago, but today they *do* look a bit odd. They sit on very low stools, or upon their tackle-boxes—sizeable affairs, these, of painted deal board—and couched beneath their right arms are what appear to be thinned down scaffold poles. They are the roach pole men.

Now for all I know there might still be fishermen that use this gear. They might, for that matter, still operate on the Highgate Pond. I just don't know, but somehow I fancy not. Somehow, I imagine that the Illingworth fixed-spool reel and its multitude of descendants would have finished them off. But at the time I speak of they were the aristocracy of the pond, and they were entitled to, and received, a certain respect. One didn't go too close to them, for that disturbed their concentration, and when their concentration was disturbed they called one's attention to the matter.

They kept the fish they caught in small cisterns that they brought with them. These were complicated structures of zinc, and would have looked comfortably at home in an old-fashioned bathroom, and suggested, sensibly enough, hydraulic engineering at an advanced stage of that science. These cisterns bulged in curious ways and odd angles, and they were finished off at the top with a heavy perforated plate under which one might glimpse the defeated fish, sullen, scarred and revengeful. I do not know this for sure, but I rather suspect that the interior of the cisterns contained safety devices calculated to protect the hand from attack by particularly savage roach. This strikes you as an exaggeration? Perhaps it is, but if you knew the Highgate Pond roach, you would, I think, regard it as a pardonable one.

For, you must consider, the Highgate Pond fish passed his days in almost perfect safety, but for the activities of these roach pole fellows. Except for a continuous band of water some twelve feet wide at the edge, the whole area of water was quite safe for any fishy goings-on, and this danger band had existed since the invention of the hook, and the knowledge and avoidance



## *The Third Pond*

of it must, if there be anything in the theories of the late Mr. Darwin, have been bred into the inheritance of every fish in the pond. Twelve feet, I can assure you, is ample allowance for the average cast on that water, for no matter what vigour and skill one put into the initial action, one was sure to find one's float bobbing faithfully beneath one's rod point within a minute or so. *Lying on?* My dear Sir! Utterly out of the question. Consider the nature of the bed at that point. Old crust. Decomposed paste. Greaves, (I don't actually know what greaves are or is, but I remember that all the books recommended it at the time). Rotting ground bait. Maggots. And so on.

What chance would one's pinch of paste have among all this obscenity? Obviously none whatever, even supposing that one of the few imbecile fish that the pond contained happened to be threading its way among the dozens of suspended baits that constituted a sort of thicket in the twelve foot area. No. You see, as I said, there was really no danger for a normal roach, but for the existence of the roach pole men. It was the extra reach of the pole that was his undoing. Twenty feet out over the water was the reach of it, eight feet within the safety zone, so it is no wonder that any roach browsing quietly within his accustomed pastures and finding his tit-bit attached to a No. 14, sneaky bend, was irritated. As of course you know the roach pole is fished tight line, and a mere foot or so of line at that. It's my belief that one and possibly the chief reason for the rather canny attitude, that disinclination to talk to strangers on the part of roach pole men, was due to the fact that they were not overkeen on having their tackle examined or even talked about. That short line was probably Bowden wire. It *had* to be. What chance was there of holding a fighting Highgate Pond roach on a couple of feet of silk? The more I think about it the more certain I become, it was Bowden wire, depend upon it. Not that I imagine they would ever admit it, or that we shall ever know for certain. I fancy I see your eyebrows lift in incredulity. Bowden wire for a roach? I know. I know. . . . It does sound incredible. But not if you've seen a Highgate Pond roach, the average half-pounder say, of that remarkable water.

I don't mean by that the average fish actually *is* a half-pounder. No, that would be an exaggeration, and I think that fishermen should, in view of the reputation they are vested with among non-fishermen, be particularly careful to avoid over-stretching things. What I mean is an average fish among half-pounders, if you understand me. Imagine to yourself a rather beamy fish, and a general appearance that suggests immense strength. Although you know, as a fact, that the lower jaw of a roach recedes, try to imagine one with the jaw of a pike. . . . Not that it *has* the jaw of a pike; I am only using this to illustrate the sort of effect it would have on you. Imagine half the

## *The Third Pond*

scales missing and the remaining ones deeply pitted and scarred from innumerable fights. If a wall-eye would suggest a touch of the monstrous to you, then add a wall-eye; but above all, imagine strength. The pond, of course, is strongly impregnated with iron . . . centuries of lost hooks. And, lastly think of the . . . well, I apologise, but I must out with it, think of the *smell*. Now I know that in decent angling society nobody ever mentions this, just as in ordinary society one never calls a woman ugly. Since the roach is possibly the commonest fish in British waters it would be silly to continually bring up this question of smell, but there it is, and so far as Highgate Pond roach are concerned, you may heighten the ordinary beastly smell to the concentration of an essence. The roach pole men smoked shag, but for all that I have seen them drape their fish-cisterns with old wet blankets. And it wasn't to keep the fish cool, either.

I may perhaps have dwelt too long on these roach pole men and their quarry. We have been standing on the bank all this while, me with my little five-foot bamboo, my beautiful float tackle and so on, and I haven't yet wetted a line. I had better find a place to fish. Now in spite of the size of the pond, this is not quite so easy as it might appear, for all the best places, naturally, are already taken by the roach pole men not to mention other adult fishermen who put their faith in rods with reels attached. There is a further complication, too, and that is that on certain days of the week, the pond became a sort of miniature Solent, and model yachts, some of them a matter of five feet long, raced and held competitions there. A small boy with a small rod was very small beer indeed among all this grandeur, and a yachtsman, racing up to save the bowsprit of his craft from impact with the piles, seldom troubled himself about causing disturbance even to the roach polers, let alone to the pitch of a small boy.

I was not then, nor for that matter am I now, scientifically minded about fishing. The mere fact that fish could be guaranteed to exist in a certain stretch of water is, to me, a matter of indifference if the glory of the prospect is diluted by a factory chimney. A tin kettle in the infinitely slow process of dissolution, or an old pram wheel maintaining its identity among the rocks of a stickle, sadden me, and I move on. This delicacy was extravagant perhaps so far as the pond was concerned, and I am in honour bound to observe that old kettles and similar obsolescent domestic appliances were rigorously removed by the keepers when observed. What exactly it was that whispered to me "Here" as I perambulated the edge of the water, I do not know, but I do know that it had little to do with the prospect of a rich take.

If I was to avoid trouble later, the pitch chosen had to be dry—for I had nothing in the way of cushion or stool. It had also to be under a willow, but as the number of willows was constant and the number of fishermen varied,

## *The Third Pond*

I did not always get a willow. One other thing: I hated to be able to see the bottom. It is true that by sitting as low as possible and getting the light at a certain angle of refraction, one could avoid actually seeing the bed, but I couldn't command enough of the ostrich to be comfortable under these conditions, and I was unhappy if congestion on the bank forced me to accept such a mockery of hope. It is quite true that imbecile roach would occasionally, if one had remained absolutely still for a long time, wander into these undesirable shallows, cruise around in a vacant sort of way and on occasion actually nose one's pinch of paste. But they weren't moron enough to take it.

It was one thing to have to end one's day without a bite, but quite another to be so publicly ridiculed, and that by a fish "in lunacy", as the lawyers say. In deeper water, of course, mysterious things went on that one couldn't see. To retrieve one's hook after a late strike and actually find that one's bait had gone was hopeful. One was in a good place, and one would strike quicker next time. Not that one did, and looking back one realises that the five feet of stiff cane, that had about as much delicacy built into it as a crowbar, was almost fish-proof. The roach that was going to be lifted out with that apparatus would have to be not merely moronic, but in a delirium of self-immolation. And so one sat there and watched one's float.

You are still there? Not for one moment do I want to hurry you off, but in common decency I ought to tell you that there'll be no more to it now than just watching the float. The mood in which I first sat down will slowly and quite imperceptibly change, until the magical singing that was in the trees and in the very air will grow fainter, and finally cease. All sense of life and expectation will leave the water, and all that will be left will be the quiet tranquility of a summer's morning. The unmoving float and its mirror image will still hold my attention, but even so I shall no longer fear to look away lest I miss a bite.

My inner self is certain that there will be no bite. In a little while I shall notice that a roach pole man is eating something, something furtive and anonymous, out of a paper bag, and I shall be recalled to the hour. Golly, is it so late as that? I shall have to run for it. The line is untied and the now swollen and dank water-cord is wound into its sheath. The knees have become locked in a sort of rigor, and find it pleasant to be released and set in motion again. The remaining bread paste is sent to join the oozy bed of the danger zone, and the waters quietly set about their business of rendering it into slime.

Did I catch many fish in the Highgate Pond? No, frankly, not many. In fact I never caught a single fish during the whole time I fished there as a boy. But it didn't matter, for I liked fishing, and so far as that goes, I still do.

DAVID JACQUES

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*Detective Work on the  
Whirling Blue Dun*

DAVID JACQUES is a Fellow of the Royal Entomological Society and one of Britain's leading experts on the aquatic flies. Born in Manchester in 1906, he was a Foundation Scholar of Manchester Grammar School, on the Classical Side. Came to London in 1925 and worked at "a variety of jobs" about which his reticence is utter. Now managing director of a plastics manufacturing company. His hobbies are fishing and collecting antique porcelain teapots.



## *Detective Work on the Whirling Blue Dun*

DAVID JACQUES

AS THE STORY of the Whirling Blue Dun unfolds, it reveals a paradox without parallel in the long history of angling. For the mystery of its identity—and a mystery there certainly is—continues to baffle even though it has apparently been solved on more than one occasion. But the very diversity of the solutions has served only to emphasise that the mists which surround the question are just as impenetrable as ever. Perhaps this effort of mine to shed a little light will, like previous efforts, befog the atmosphere even more. We shall see.

That a problem should exist at all is somewhat incredible, for the mystery is not one caused by the lack or even paucity of information. On the contrary, a great deal has been written about our central figure; indeed, only a little more than a hundred years ago, the greatest fisherman-entomologist of his time not only named the insect specifically and scientifically, in addition to describing it, but also left to posterity a hand-coloured illustration, which for outline and clarity is wholly admirable. I would not take it amiss, therefore, if a reader of these prefatory remarks were to exclaim in the words (almost) of Puck, "What fools these anglers be!"

## Detective Work on the Whirling Blue Dun

The problem is to discover the identity of a fly, if such indeed ever existed, known since The Compleat Angler as the Whirling Blue Dun. There are those who say that there "aint no sich animal", or that it is the Mrs. 'Arris of the insect world. They insist that it refers only to an artificial fly. I think the reader will agree that the evidence of our writing forbears does not support this view. But before we scrutinize the evidence in an endeavour to make it articulate, let us see what conclusions have been reached by eminent writers and entomologists as a result of their own investigations into this intriguing enigma.

Firstly, Mr. D. E. Kimmins, the great authority on aquatic and other insects, and the late Courtney Williams, identify it as the August Dun, *Ecdyonurus dispar*.

Secondly, the late Eric Taverner states (*Trout Fishing*, page 161): "Surely this Whirling Blue is none other than the large species of Pale Watery mentioned above, *Centroptilum pennulatum*!"

Thirdly, J. R. Harris (*An Angler's Entomology*, page 133) states: "the name Whirling Blue Dun has obviously been applied to several species by different authors, and, whilst it is probable that Ronalds's Whirling Blue is a synonym for the Large Dark Olive Dun, *Baetis rhodani*, which appears in the autumn, it would be problematic indeed if many of the other species coming under the name could be identified with much certainty".

The only other identification I will quote is one suggested by Leonard West and others, that is, the False March Brown, *Ecdyonurus venosus*.

I need hardly stress the extent of the disparity between the conflicting views. Nevertheless, the different appearance of these four insects in their dun stages will be apparent to the less entomologically minded of my readers from the following tables of descriptions:—

### August Dun—*Ecdyonurus dispar*

*Wings* Drab beige/brown/yellow with black or brown veins.  
*Body* Drab brownish/olive, more brown than olive.  
*Legs* Brown/olive.

### Pale Watery—*Centroptilum pennulatum*

*Wings* Grey/blue.  
*Body* Pale grey/green.  
*Legs* Pale watery, almost colourless.

### Large Dark Olive—*Baetis rhodani*

*Wings* Bluish/grey.  
*Body* Dark olive.  
*Legs* Medium to dark olive.

## *Detective Work on the Whirling Blue Dun*

False March Brown—*Ecdyonurus venosus*

*Wings* Beige with black veins.

*Body* Brown with olive tinge.

*Legs* Dark brown/olive.

Similar to the August Dun, but larger.

We shall return to these flies later. Now let us begin to examine the facts that have been recorded by writers at a time when, I suppose, the identity that is puzzling us today was ordinary common knowledge.

The first mention of the Whirling Blue Dun that I have been able to trace is in *The Compleat Angler*, and at once its ambiguity seems to presage with grim forboding the perplexity that is destined to vex future generations of fly-fishers. "We have", it states, "besides for this month (March) a little Dun called a Whirling Dun, though it is not the Whirling Dun indeed, which is one of the best flies we have; and for this the dubbing must be of the bottom fur of a squirrels tail and the wing of the gray (sic) feather of a drake."

Here's a pretty start. A Whirling Dun that is not a Whirling Dun. Hm-m-m.

It continues later: "About the 12th of this month (April) comes in the fly called the Whirling Dun, which is taken every day about the mid-time of day, all this month through, and by fits from thence to the end of June; and is commonly made of the down of a fox-cub, which is ash colour at the roots, next to the skin, and ribbed about with yellow silk; the wings of the pale grey feather of a mallard".

I shall not bore the reader with verbatim extracts from the various writings that deal with the subject. The authors, and the dates of their writing, are as follows:—

Richard Howlett	1706
Brookes	1801
Thomas Best	1822
James Rennie	1833
Charles Bowlker	1839
James Wallwork	1847

Lastly, and most important of all,

Alfred Ronalds	1836
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Although there are some differences in the dressings given for the artificial fly by the various authors, Ronalds' recipe is close enough to them all to be accepted as a typical imitation. What is significant, however, is the time or



## Detective Work on the Whirling Blue Dun

times of the year the natural fly makes its appearances, and this we may construe either as inexplicable confusion—or else as evidence of the most important kind.

As we have already seen, according to *The Compleat Angler* it (or an impostor) can be found in the months of March, April, May and June.

Brookes, Best and Bowlker give its month as August, the latter adding that it lasts until the end of the season.

Ronalds states that it is in season until the middle of October.

If we discard the possibility of widespread ignorance among the authors about the fly and the time of year it hatches—and we are led to do so by the uniformity of their description of its physical appearance—we are left with the alternative that the fly is one which is likely to be seen at any time of the year, from early spring to late autumn. I take this as our first major clue.

We now come to the important testimony we have inherited from Alfred Ronalds. It is five-fold. First we have the scientific name. Second, we have a coloured picture of the natural fly. Third, we have a description of it. Fourth, we have the artificial dressing and, lastly, a brief description of the spinner. I shall deal with each point in turn.

The Scientific Name: This is given as follows:—

Order	<i>Neuroptera</i>
Family	<i>Ephemeridae</i>
Genus	<i>Baetis</i>

Unfortunately, he gives the same scientific name to the Blue Dun, March Brown, Yellow Dun, Iron Blue, Yellow May, Sky Blue and August Dun, so I fear we must back out of this blind alley, as we have run slap into a solid brick wall.

Coloured Picture:

This shows an upright winged dun, with blue/grey wings, rather full. The body is a rusty olive, something like a ripening greengage. The legs are medium olive. There are two tails of indistinguishable colour. The insect is medium size.

Description:

Quote. "This fly comes from a water nymph, lives about three days as shown, then turns to a Light Red Spinner. It is in season until the middle of October, and on the water chiefly in blustering cold weather. It has been supposed to be a second edition of the Yellow Dun of April. If compared with that it will be found rather smaller and more of a ginger colour."

Dressing:

**Body** Squirrel's red/brown fur mixed with yellow mohair, tied with yellow silk thread, well-waxed.

**Tail** One or two whisks of a pale ginger hackle.

## *Detective Work on the Whirling Blue Dun*

*Wings* Feather from a starling's wing.  
*Legs* Pale ginger hackle.

Spinner:

Quote. "The Red Spinner lives three or four days. In making it reference may be had to Fig. 3, Plate 4. It must be rather lighter than that figure."

Fig. 3, Plate 4 shows a spinner of the Blue Dun, generally agreed to be the Large Dark Olive. The wings are transparent, with a brownish tinge, and the body is a bright red/brown. The legs of the artificial are of red cock.

Here is our second major clue. The dun has full blue/grey wings, a rusty olive body and medium olive legs. The spinner has the usual transparent wings and light brown/red body. This is confirmed by the description of the spinners of the Yellow Dun, of which the Whirling Blue Dun is regarded as a second edition, which is as follows:—

"This Yellow Dun changes to a spinner of rather a lighter and yellower brown than that which the Blue Dun turns to, and is very nearly the same size. . . ."

I should now like to deviate a little from the main theme and try to find some meaning where none has yet been satisfactorily found, that is, in the name, Whirling Blue.

According to the O.E.D., the word "whirl" as a noun can refer either to a pulley of a spindle, a spinning bait used in fishing, any rotary or circling movement, or a dizzy state of mind. They all obviously derive from the verb "to whirl" which means to move about, chiefly in rotation. Some authorities therefore believe the name to be descriptive of the flight of the dun as it leaves the water for the first time, the impression being one of "whirling" or "spinning". I personally discount this version, as the flight of any upwing dun is no different from that of any other upwing dun; nor does it, in my eyes, resemble a rotating motion.

In pursuit of some lead to the origin of the name, I have assiduously searched old fishing books for the use of the word "whirl" in any context whatsoever. I found only that it was commonly used in dressing artificial flies to describe the method of applying a peacock feather to a hook to imitate the body. Both Walton and Howlett used the expression "a whirl of a peacock's feather". The former also wrote of "the twirl of dubbing" for a body, and perhaps the two words "twirl" and "whirl" were synonymous and used indiscriminately by anglers to describe the same process of winding a feather or a fur dubbing on to a hook. On the other hand, the word "whirl" in the first context may be a corruption of "herl", meaning a "fibre", which is derived from the German "harle", meaning a fibre of hemp.

The description "whirling" may therefore have referred originally to the

## Detective Work on the Whirling Blue Dun

process of preparing the artificial fly, and not to the natural insect, with which it became associated later.

On the other hand, we must not lightly dismiss the possibility of the word being a corruption of some simple adjective used by untutored and unlettered countrymen, whose powers of observation were often remarkably good. Such an adjective might have been "early", in reference to its March appearance, or "yearly", or some word lost to us by the passage of centuries.

The word "Blue" must signify some particular property of the insect, and in my opinion it can refer only to the wing. Indeed, with the exception of the Iron Blue, I know of no upwing insect with a body that can even remotely be described as blue. Of the Ephemeroptera, there are three species that may be said to possess blue wings. They are the Large Dark Olive—*Baetis rhodani* (known also as the Blue Dun and Blue Upright), the Pale Watery—*Centroptilum pennulatum* (known also as the Blue-Winged Pale Watery), and the Blue-Wing Olive—*Ephemerella ignita*.

It will be noticed that the first named is the choice of J. R. Harris for the vacant position, and the second one that of the late Eric Taverner. The third named has been ignored, as the coloured illustration in Ronalds clearly shows two tails, whereas the Blue-Wing Olive has three. More of this later.

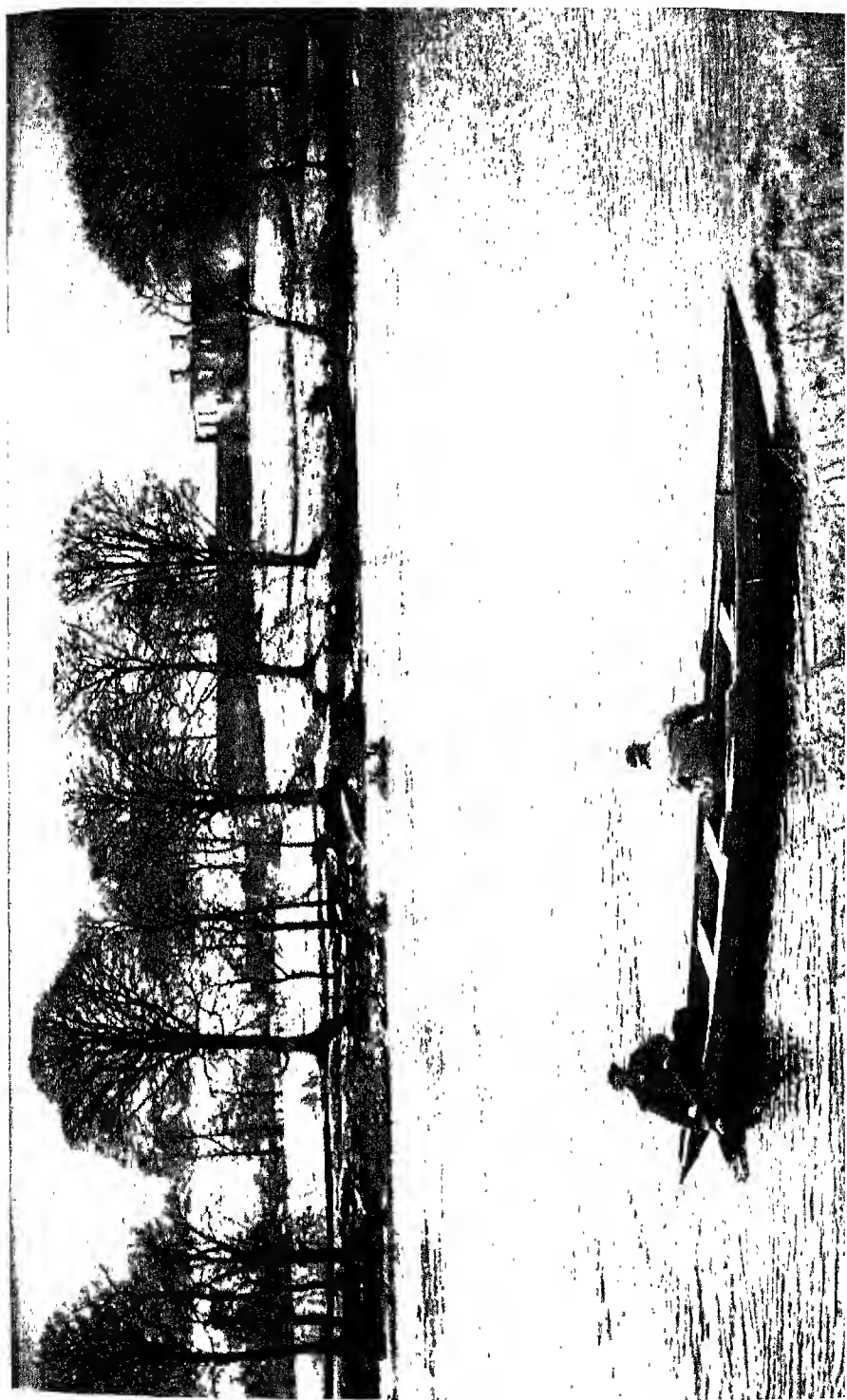
At this stage, let us sum up what we have derived from our analysis of the evidence.

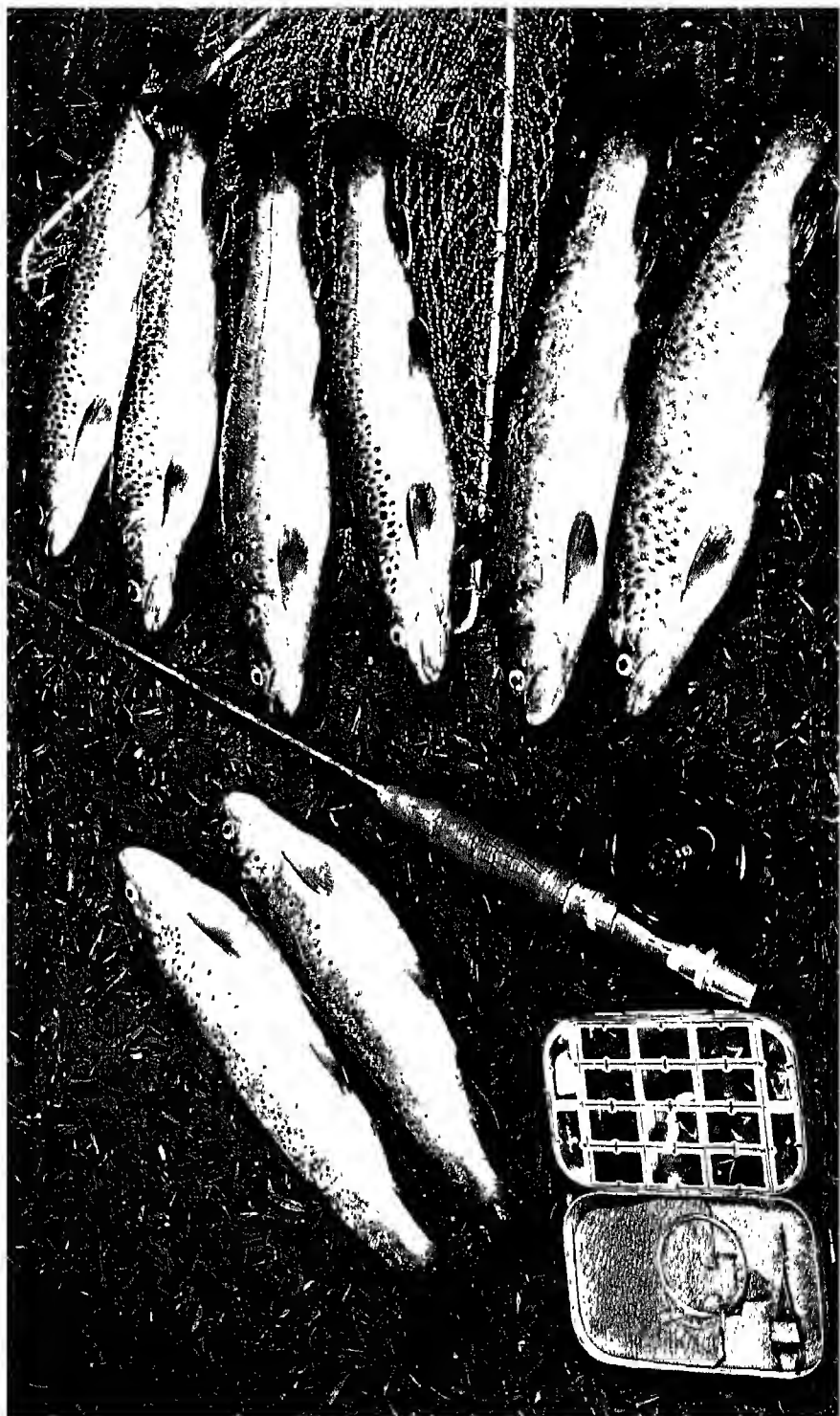
- (1) The fly is likely to appear at any time, or at all times, of the fishing season.
- (2) It has a rusty gingery olive body, blue/grey upright wings, and transposes into a pale brownish/red spinner.
- (3) It has two tails.
- (4) From the number of times it is mentioned, it must be one of our commonest flies.

Now let us examine the various solutions postulated at the beginning of this article, and see how each corresponds to the established picture.

### August Dun—*Ecdyonurus dispar*

One of the points in favour of the August Dun is mentioned by Courtney Williams in his celebrated *Dictionary of Trout Flies*. He states that Ronalds' sketches for his book were made from "models" (*sic*) which are, or were, in the Hope Department of the Oxford University Museum, and a perusal of the collection has revealed the fact that the Whirling Blue Dun was the August Dun. With great respect for the advocates of this interpretation, I propose that it must be decisively rejected. For No. 38 of Ronalds' flies is none other than the August Dun, so clearly drawn, titled and coloured as to be unmistakable, and rightly described by him, according to his dressing of





## *Detective Work on the Whirling Blue Dun*

the imitation, with a brown body, and a brownish wing. Furthermore, the wing of the August Dun, even according to Courtney Williams is very similar to that of the March Brown, which has brownish wings with distinct black venations. In any event, it is not credible that Ronalds described the August Dun correctly under its own name and five pages later described the same fly incorrectly under the name of the Whirling Blue Dun.

### Pale Watery—*Centroptilum pennulatum*

The wing is correct, but the colour of the body incorrect. Nor according to Skues did the late Eric Taverner persist in his opinion, for the former stated "It is true that Eric Taverner in his *Trout Fishing from all Angles* . . . would identify it [*Centroptilum pennulatum*] with the Whirling Blue Dun, but I have reason to believe that he no longer holds that opinion". (Page 266—*Way of a Trout with a Fly*).

### Large Dark Olive—*Baetis rhodani*

This is the choice of J. R. Harris, and the elimination of the August Dun and the Blue-Wing Pale Watery seems to indicate that it must be the correct one. It certainly appears in the spring, and occasionally in the autumn and winter. The size is correct, and, like Ronalds' illustration, has two tails. Also, the size and colour of the wing are in accordance with the required specification. Yet it, too, must be rejected, for the following reasons:—

- (a) The Large Dark Olive, generally known as the Large Dark Olive of spring, is an early season, and sometimes a late season fly. It certainly cannot be described as one that appears continuously from March until October.
- (b) The colour of the body, and I have examined many of them with great care, does not correspond to that of either the Whirling Blue Dun or of the Yellow Dun, which according to Ronalds are probably one and the same insect. Moreover, the ginger or red hackle tied in for the legs render them completely unlike *Baetis rhodani*, as the stem of the feather gives the front part of the body an amber or rusty colour which the Large Dark Olive lacks. Also, it is generally agreed that Ronalds' Blue Dun is none other than *Baetis rhodani*, a view to which Harris himself subscribes, and the dressing which he gives for this imitation is very different from that of either the Yellow Dun or the Whirling Blue Dun. Again, I cannot believe that Ronalds described the same fly three times under three names without indicating that there was probably some connection between them. It is true that he mentioned the same fly twice, that is, the Yellow Dun and the Whirling Blue Dun, but he admits the fact quite clearly and gives almost identical dressings for them both. Surely if the Blue Dun, which is undoubtedly the Large

## *Detective Work on the Whirling Blue Dun*

Dark Olive, were the same insect he would have stated the connection and dressed the imitation similarly?

- (c) Neither the male nor female spinners of the Large Dark Olive correspond to the spinner of the Whirling Blue Dun as described by Ronalds.

Now that the main contenders for the vacant title have been eliminated, we are at an impasse, for the only candidate left to us is the B.W.O., which appears to be disqualified because of its three tails. But now I have touched the subject of the B.W.O. I propose to pursue it.

The B.W.O. is one of the most prolific and widespread members of the Ephemeroptera in the British Isles. It hatches out, often in huge numbers, not only throughout the fisherman's season, but also at Christmas, December, January and February (*Keeper of the Stream*, by Frank Sawyer: page 64). The first use of the name was by Halford in 1886, but nowhere does he give any hint of the name by which it was previously known. Obviously, unless it suddenly evolved at the end of the 19th century, which is unlikely, it must have been a well-known fly, widely imitated and written about. It cannot have been ignored throughout the years by a succession of writers who described most of the waterbred insects of the rivers of these isles. Its distinctive features which cannot fail to be noticed even by a casual observer would automatically have won it recognition as a separate species. Certainly Ronalds cannot have failed to notice and describe it. By what name was it then known before Halford? Let us glance again at our summing up of the main features of the Whirling Blue Dun and let us see how it and the B.W.O. correspond.

- (1) The fly is likely to appear at any time, or at all times of the year.

*This applies to the B.W.O.*

- (2) It has a rusty gingery olive body, blue/grey upright wings and transposes into a pale brownish/red spinner.

*This applies to the male B.W.O. dun, and to both the male and female spinners.*

- (3) It has two tails.

*The B.W.O. has three tails.*

- (4) From the number of times it is mentioned, it must be one of our commonest flies.

*This applies to the B.W.O.*

I do not think that there is any doubt that were it not for the two tails in Ronalds' illustration of the Whirling Blue Dun, the overwhelming consensus of opinion would favour the B.W.O. as the modern name of the same fly. Harris, however, is of the opinion that Ronalds does indeed mention and describe the B.W.O., calling it the July Dun. With great respect to an eminent

## *Detective Work on the Whirling Blue Dun*

fisherman-entomologist, this is most unlikely, even though the illustration of the July Dun shows three tails. Firstly, the B.W.O. is considerably larger than the July Dun illustrated, especially in the wing. Secondly, the dressing of the dun is more appropriate for a dark olive. Thirdly, Ronalds states that it changes to a small Dark Spinner, which the B.W.O. certainly does not.

Harris also records that Ronalds states that the Orange Dun and the July Dun are favourite flies on the River Dove, and he concludes from this that it is probable that the former is the male and the latter the female of the B.W.O. In my own first edition of Ronalds this is omitted; and I believe this statement comes from the fifth edition. The Orange Fly mentioned in Ronalds' first edition is an ichneumon fly.

For some years I have made a study of the B.W.O. in the nymphal, dun and spinner stages, and some of my articles on the insect in "The Field" may be familiar to the reader. It is interesting to recall the frequency with which I have captured specimens of duns and spinners, or watched them transpose from the nymph to the dun, with only two tails—the third one missing, and later found upon examination under magnification broken off within the cast exuvia. Often a stump remains upon the living insect and can clearly be seen, but occasionally even under the microscope the only evidence of the third tail is a dark spot at the abdominal extremity at the point of fracture. I do not suggest that Ronalds was ignorant of this fact. I merely advance the theory that an error was made by the artist who drew the illustrations, either because the living insect he copied had only two tails, or because he confused his instructions and gave fly No. 33 three tails instead of two, and gave fly No. 42 two tails instead of three.

This, in my opinion, is the only possible solution to the identity of the Whirling Blue Dun.



*It is true of fly-fishing, more perhaps than of any other branch of angling, that no sooner have you made a flat statement than you have to qualify it.*

TEACH YOURSELF FLY FISHING, by Maurice Wiggin

*Angling may be said to be so like mathematics that it can never be fully learnt.*

Izaak Walton

*Let us drop the pretence for a moment, and admit that we fly dressers collect fur and feather chiefly because it is very good fun.*

RIVERSIDE REFLECTIONS, by C. F. Walker





RICHARD WALKER

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*Rustic Runyon*

RICHARD WALKER is an engineer and manufacturer of mowing machines, a Cambridge graduate, and probably the most controversial writer on angling today. His weekly column in *Angling Times*, and later writings in the London *Evening Standard* (where he followed Maurice Wiggin as Angling Correspondent) have always aroused intense discussion. Walker is a scientific and uncompromising thinker who has cut across conventional and hallowed precepts to pioneer radically new techniques for the capture of coarse fish. His book *Still Water Angling* is the definitive standard classic on the subject; his British record carp, a 44-pounder, still lives in London Zoo aquarium. But although Walker's trenchant no-nonsense approach and forthright commonsense have made him the acknowledged, if contentious, leader of modern angling thought, there is another side to the man, as the following stories show. In fact he is one of the most amusing men concerned with fishing today. These stories should dispel the myth that for Dick Walker, angling is a grim and deadly serious business.



## *Rustic Runyon*

RICHARD WALKER

### *1 Wassit For?*

WE GOT THIS thing from America it said in the ad gets you fish when all your fishing buddies are skunked Fred said it'll make a bit of interest we can do a story on it and they can all say it ought to be barred won't be a fish left and the hallmark of a true angler is can he use a centrepin.

Joe said wossit for? I said they call it a fish finder you stuff this bit in your earoles and that bit in the river and you can tell if there are fish.

We took it to Ibsley Colonel Crow said what's that? I said it's a fish finder you stick this in your earoles and that in the water and you can tell if there are fish. Colonel Crow said all right now let's go and catch some pike so we stalked about seven miles up the river through the brambles and thistles and then Colonel Crow said this is where you fish.

Fred fixed up a rod and I put the bits in my earoles and the end in the water and it sounded exactly like water running past till Fred cast out a dead herring and then it said bloop and I said it works it works I could hear your herring go in.

I pointed it all ways and after half an hour it said bloop bloop and I said there's a fish that away Fred and he just opened and shut his mouth and the thing went bloop bloop and I said Fred there's a fish coming near and he mouthed at me again and I said it's as loud as hell must be right under your feet and then I noticed he was lifting his herring out of the water so I took

## *Rustic Runyon*

the bits out of my earoles and he shouted at me at the top of his voice I'm winding my herring in you great nutcase.

I said there's no need to shout dammit I'm not deaf if you're going to bellow about like that I'm off up the river a bit.

I left the fish finder where Fred was fishing and took my roach tackle and went off up the river to find a good roach swim. After a bit I found one and started catching roach about a pound apiece I put em in a keepnet presently Fred came along with the fish finder he had the bits stuffed in his earoles and kept poking the other thing in the water when he got within twenty yards he jumped and then yelled Dick you're fishing in the wrong place the fish are right under your feet I said yes in my keepnet Fred said why are you casting out in the middle you'll never catch any there they're right under your feet I can hear em going bloop bloop bloop its fascinating.

I said they're in my bloody keepnet you nit. Fred said I can hear fish right under your feet why are you casting out in the middle but it's no good trying to advise some people is it? I said if you take them bits out of your earoles you'll hear me saying the fish you can hear are in my keepnet. Fred said all right be pigheaded Walker but I tell you the fish are right under your feet not out where you're casting.

Then Fred Russell and his mate arrived and said wossit for Fred? and Fred said hallo Fred I can't hear a word you say I've got these bits stuffed in my earoles so Russell said wossit for Dick and I said you stuff those bits in your earoles and that bit in the water and it tells you if there are any fish. Fred had come nearer so I shouted FRED LET FRED HAVE A LISSEN so Fred took the bits out of his earoles and said thank God for lovely fresh air here Fred would you like to have a lissen? You stuff these bits in your earoles and that bit in the water and it tells you if there are any fish about.

Russell stuffed the bits in his earoles and the other thing in the water and looked thoughtful moving the proggler about and then his eyebrows went up and he said Dick Dick I can hear em they're right under your feet not out in the middle where you're casting. Fred said I told him but he won't believe me I said of course they're under my feet you steaming nit they're in my bloody keepnet Fred said oh and turned to Russell and said they're in his keepnet under his feet and Russell said wotsay so I held up the keepnet.

Fred said well if it can hear fish in a keepnet it should hear fish in the river. I said point it at my float I know fish are there I was catching roach till you lot turned up and Fred stuffed the bits in his earoles and tried but you could see he wasn't getting any messages.

After five minutes I hooked a roach and started to bring it in and Fred said I got 'em I got 'em right where your float was where is it now I can hear fish cast out where you were before they're there I can hear 'em now I've



*Richard Walker, uncrowned king of coarse fishers and author of the standard work, Still Water Angling, takes a nice perch from the Hampshire Avon*



## *Rustic Runyon*

lost 'em no I've got 'em nearer the bank that's funny they must be moving it's loud now more to your left I've lost 'em that last noise was close.

I unhooked the fish and put it in the keepnet. Fred said that's funny can't hear a thing now. I said you heard the fish I just landed and Fred said shush dammit I'm trying to find where the fish are for you, can't hear a thing if you keep shouting.

I stopped fishing and presently Fred took the bits out of his earoles and I said you heard the fish I just landed and Fred said oh funny thing you don't notice much when you're listening we need practice with this thing we must find exactly where some fish are and then listen for 'em. It'll make a bit of interest.

On the way back we met a man with a salmon rod and he said good afternoon very polite I hope you don't mind my enquiring but what ever is the purpose of that device you are carrying? I said well you stuff these bits in your earoles and that bit in the water and it tells you if there are any fish about he said really really but surely a scientific device such as that will take all the fun out of fishing?

## 2 *Evaded me*

KEN AND JOE had started off ahead of us, so when Fred and I arrived we had to walk along the river bank to find them, and on the way we found Wilfred fishing in the straight stretch near the farm buildings.

Wilfred said hello Fred hello Dick you going fishing? Fred said hello Wilfred done any good and Wilfred said not a knock, they've evaded me again.

I said what have? and Wilfred said chub, I've been fishing for them all morning but they've evaded me.

Fred said Joe usually gets 'em in that swim and Wilfred said probably fished out then I'll move.

He reeled in, collected up his gear and went off downstream. Fred and I continued on up. In about three hundred yards we found Ken. Ken said hello my cocks, late as usual, fishing's over now, when do we eat?

Fred said I know that bigheaded look you cunning beggar, how big is it and Ken said it? it? you mean how big are *they*, five and a half, five, and three and three-quarters. Chub.

He pulled out his keepnet and there they were.

We took some photographs and Fred said are you done? and Ken said I haven't had a touch for an hour and Fred said right come on let's cheer up Wilfred. Off they went downstream with the fish and Ken's tackle, dipping the keepnet at intervals, and Ken got down the bank where Wilfred had



## *Rustic Runyon*

been fishing, lowered the keepnet into the water, stuck in a rod rest and cast out.

Fred and I went on down till we found Wilfred. Fred said any better here? and Wilfred said no they've evaded me here too and Fred said you left that straight stretch a bit too soon old man and Wilfred said why? and Fred said come and see.

Back we all went to where Ken was and Fred said show Wilfred what you've got in that net Ken and Ken lifted the net and Fred said didn't evade Ken did they?

Wilfred put both hands on his head and said oh what a mug I was to leave that swim wasn't I. I suppose my groundbait attracted 'em, what do they go?

Ken said five and half five and three and threequarters and Wilfred said evaded me again.

Joe appeared coming along the bank and Ken said any good my cock? and Joe said I went up to the deep bend and put on a damn great bit of paste bigger than a golf ball and that laid there four hours and I never had a bite that must have been a damn great fish that never took that bait. I said weren't the dace on the go up there? and Joe said who wants to fish for dace in this river, you have to catch fifty before you get one as big as ten ounces and then its a little chub done any good my cocks?

Fred said Dick and I haven't started yet we're going to fish the big eddy so keep your ugly mug out of it Ken's got two five pounders and a three pounder. Joe said what, chub? and Ken said yes chub and Joe said what about Wilfred? and Wilfred said they've evaded me again.

Fred and I went to the big eddy and it was full of fish. Fred got four perch over 2-lbs. apiece and several pounders, a five-pound chub and about 30 pounds of roach. I got about 20 pounds of roach, two four-pound chub, several pound perch and a pike of 11½ pounds. All on worms.

Fred said fish on Walker, but it will do you no good, you're beat today and I said weight or numbers? and Fred said both, you're beat and you know it and I said what about biggest fish and Fred said best specimen percentage of record still you're beat Walker give way do and I said I suppose the day had to come, teach a man all you know and he must beat you sooner or later and Fred said drop dead bighead look at those grey wagtails they walk like Sophia Loren ain't it cold? I shall be glad when I've had enough of this.

I said thin chaps always feel the cold most and then Fred's float went down and he struck and missed and said evaded me.

I caught another roach about a pound and a half and it looked beautiful, they always do when the landscape is bleak and you see them against a background of grey water and brown rushes. I said look at that my cock don't it

## *Rustic Runyon*

look a picture? and Fred said concentrate Walker big fish catchers haven't got time to admire the beauties of nature or don't you read the letter page of *Angling Times*.

I said yes we take our fishing too seriously don't we never a smile and then along came Wilfred and said hello Dick hello Fred done any good? and Fred said between us four two pound perch three big chub and half a hundred-weight of roach and Dick's got a pike eleven pounds.

Wilfred said good good makes a bit of interest don't it? Fred said you done anything? and Wilfred said no they evaded me again.

### *3 Hissed Hedgehogs*

YOUNG BILLY was on about cheese-paste when along came Tom and he's as deaf as a beetle so he isn't fussed about interrupting and he said there's a damn great hedgehog up our garden and Billy said you know where you can stick it and Tom said it's been up there a fortnight.

Fred said there's one thing I always wondered about hedgehogs and Billy said me too but there's plenty of hedgehogs aren't there? and I said Fred what about that hedgehog that got in your fishing bag when we were night fishing down the straight stretch? and Fred said yes I pricked my hand on it cruel and I still wonder how it zipped up that bag after it got in.

Joe said ain't they got a lot of fleas though? and I said ticks too and Joe said where there's sheep but I don't believe it about stealing milk from sleeping cows. I said they don't half yaffle up bread and milk, they carry on at one another if they can't agree about bread and milk they hiss at each other and Fred said stands to reason if a hedgehog drinks too much he's liable to get hissed.

Billy said is that right they roll on apples and get them stuck on their spines and carry them off like that? I said there's plenty of apples that fall off my trees and plenty of hedgehogs but I never saw one roll on an apple or eat one come to that and Joe said they wouldn't they get so much bread and milk at yours, how many have you got? I said sixteen at the last count and all fat as butter.

Joe said if you rolled 'em in clay and put them in the fire ashes they'd bake and taste beautiful my cock, gipsies cook 'em like that, the spines come off in the clay they taste like chicken, I don't believe it myself but you can try it and let us know.

Billy said did you know they eat fish I had some dead roach for eel baits I went off for a cuppa and when I got back a hedgehog had et half a roach and went off with the other half it didn't curl up it ran off sharpish. Joe said I don't spose it fancied its chances with you. Tom said I'm off I can't hear a

## Rustic Runyon

word you say did I tell you there's a hedgehog up our garden? Fred wrote yes on a bit of paper and showed it to Tom and Tom said a damn great hedgehog and Billy started to say something and Fred said no not again so Billy shut up and Tom went off to the river.

Joe said pity they aren't bigger we could use the spines for floats. I said maybe the match anglers could use 'em. Fred said like that Sheffielder that Tiny Bennett asked where was his cutting board? and this chap said what dusta mean and Tiny said a board for cutting up bait on and the man said nay but I'm using maggots and Tiny said what, whole ones?

Joe said about one dust shot you'd have to get them out with pliers it would be cruel it ought to be barred. I said yes or there won't be a fish left and the art of traditional fly fishing will be lost act now before it's too late. Joe said you could get some from a dead one you often see one on the road I wonder if they ever puncture a tyre?

I said you find them dead in fields too, praps they're dying off from pragmatic hypothesis. Fred said there's a lot of that about this year probably starlings spread it.

Joe said I wonder how they got on in the freeze-up if one was at the top of a hill and started rolling it'd end up inside a tremendous great snowball it could do you a mischief if it hit you on the way down imagine it hedgehog kills well known angler. Walker old man I bet *Angling Times* would come out next week with a black border round the front page would you leave me your carp rods? I said granted as soon as asked Joe old man, and Joe said you heard him everyone lend us a file I want to cut the brake pipes on his car.

I said imagine if Fred sat on a hedgehog all fifteen stone and sits heavy with it don't he? Fred said don't say such things Dick ole man, hurts me even thinking about it. Joe said you said you wondered about hedgehogs, if you sat on one and the prickles stayed with you you could go in the field and find out, you'd be taken for just another hedgehog, let's find a hedgehog so you can try. Fred said another time praps, I'm not in the mood now I'm off to catch a chub.

Joe said ain't they got some fleas though and can't scratch, must be terrible for them no wonder they get hissed I'm glad I'm not a hedgehog aren't you? I said yes I'd rather be an otter.



*To the layman, the coarse-fisherman is definitely mentally deficient.*

CALLING ALL COARSE-FISHERS, by Alan d'Egville

C. V. HANCOCK

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*The Land of Teme  
and Gleam*

C. V. HANCOCK served the *Birmingham Post* for 35 years as leader writer, deputy editor, and literary editor. In retirement he remains its Angling Correspondent. His hobbies nowadays are "compleat angling", photography and travel. He also writes and broadcasts topographically. His record catch, he says, is getting into the Third Programme with a talk on steam-engine whistles which subsequently went out in Children's Hour. Author of *East and West of Severn* (topography) and *Rod in Hand* (fishing reminiscence).



## *The Land of Teme and Gleam*

C. V. HANCOCK

*In valleys of springs of rivers,  
By Onny and Teme and Clun,  
The country for easy livers,  
The quietest under the sun.*

AT HIS FIRST sight of Dovedale Charles Cotton's Viator exclaims: "Bless me, what mountains are here! Are we not in Wales?" Mountains are no country for easy livers. I once protested to a young rock-climbing friend, all set for Snowdonia, that mountains were not created to be scrambled over disrespectfully, but to be revered from afar. "I know," he retorted, "with a nice bit of water in the foreground!"

The highest mountains of Wales are in the west. On their rough bleak sides the big rivers rise—Dee, Severn and Wye. (Have nationalists a quarrel with Nature for taking all this Welsh water for England?) But well-favoured tributaries have their springs towards the east, among uplifted moors and foot-hills. Thence they, too, cross the transitional territory of the Borderland, the Teme into the Severn, the Lugg and Monnow into the Wye. Only the Severn's little Camlad is so contrary as to flow the opposite way, out of England into Wales. For a fly-fisher for trout and grayling the Border

## *The Land of Teme and Gleam*

counties of Salop, Hereford and Monmouth (as I class it here) compose a delectable land.

The streams of this Borderland—Onny and Teme and Clun and the dozen others that the Shropshire Lad did not name—whether big brothers or little brothers, all clearly belong to one family. The family likeness is as plain and distinctive as in the different features of such river groups as those of Derbyshire and Devon. These of which I write are neither tumbling mountain streams, like the head-waters of their main rivers, nor placid Midland brooks such as the Staffordshire Blythe, where Alfred Ronalds could study a fly-life more abundant than theirs. They are of the Border, Borderly.

Rarely is one of them eccentric enough to come cascading through a gorge, as the Teme does at Downton below Leintwardine, turning itself all of a sudden into a mile of Highland river out of place. Their habit is to flow between hills covered with thick "forest fleeces"—mostly tended nowadays by the Forestry Commission—or to meander across sheep and cattle pastures from stickle and pool to stickle and pool again. Above the wooded crests the remnant of buzzards wheel and mew for the returning rabbits. The croak of passing raven answering raven high overhead grows more common. Curlew are eloquent on the levels in spring, and where there are still thistles in autumn, there are flitting charms of goldfinches. On every beat—theirs more than ours—the dippers bob.

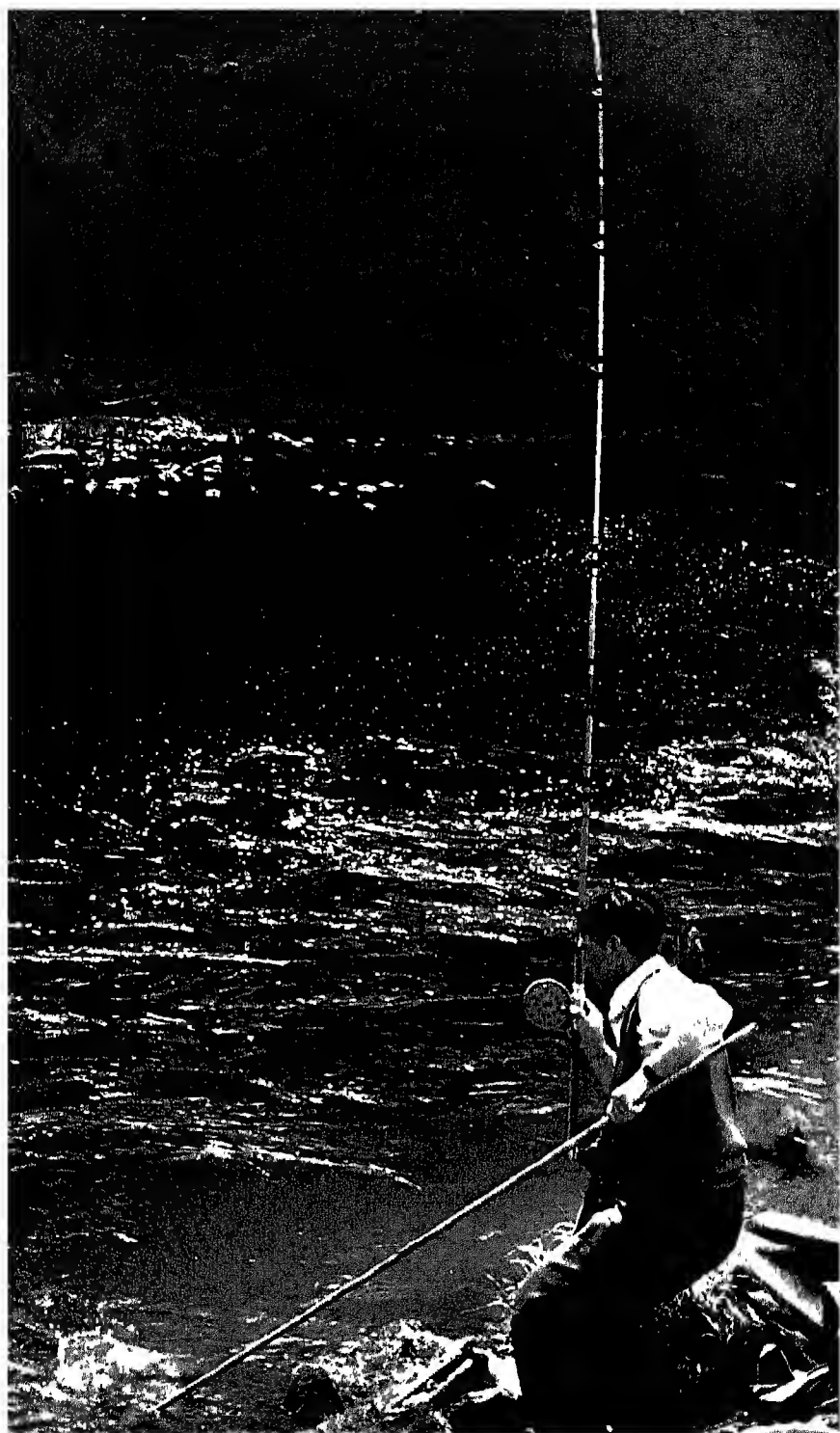
The high moors that bound the Borderland are Clun Forest, Radnor Forest and the eastern fringe of the Black Mountains. From the first comes the Teme, from the second the Lugg; their middle courses run side by side, the Teme to Ludlow, the Lugg to Leominster, many miles of delight for fly-fishers, before they separate on their predestined ways. Away to the south the stripling Monnow, joined by the Escley and the Olchon, emerges from the flank of the Black Mountains, whose main massif, however, feeds the Usk.

Do I assail and bother you with names?

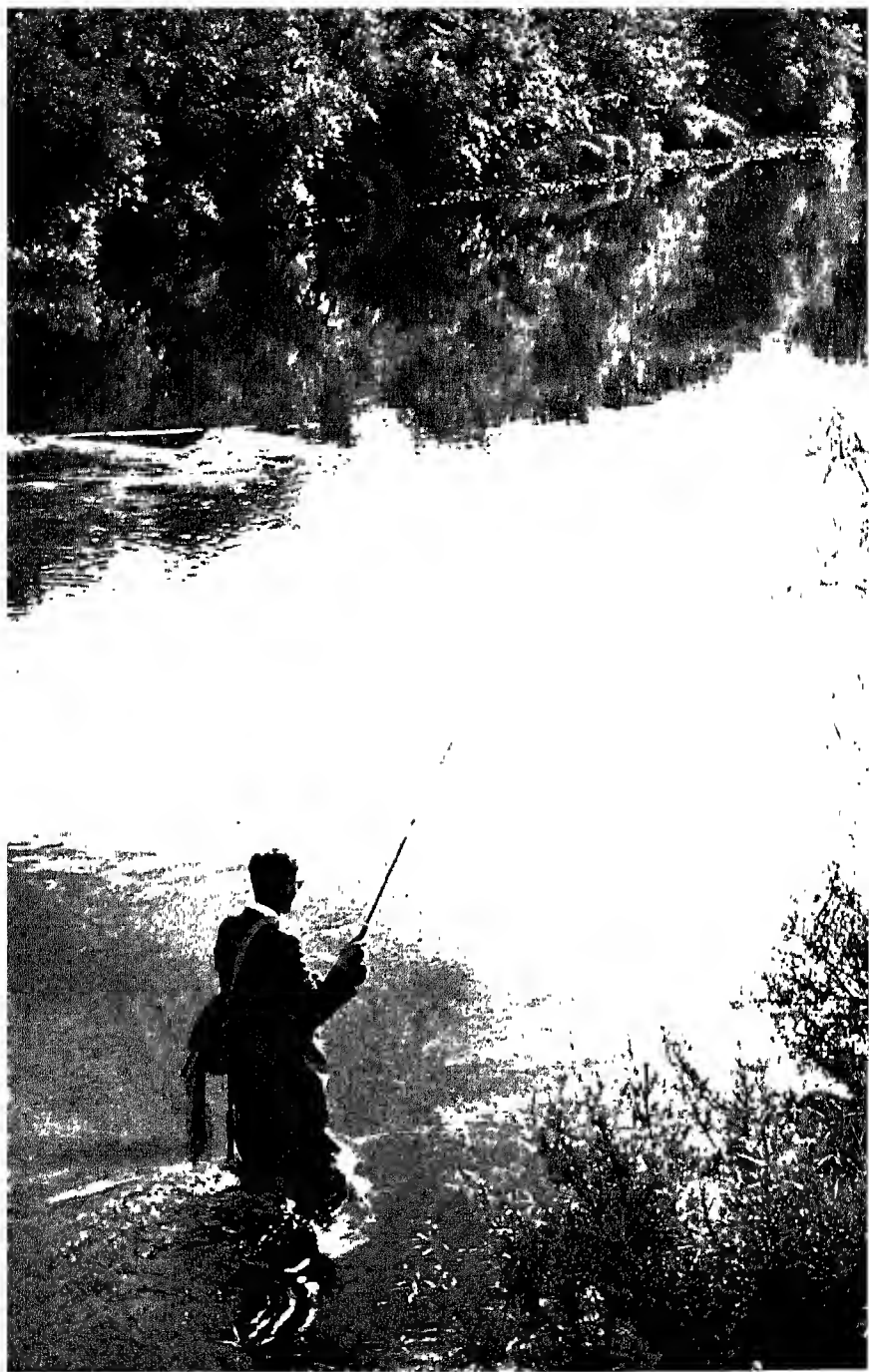
*The very names of things belov'd are dear,  
And sounds will gather beauty from their sense.*

Teme is beautiful by itself; Lugg is the ugly English docking of Llugwy, which gathers beauty when one learns it is Welsh for gleaming. I like to think of the blessed pair as the Rivers Teme and Gleam.

And there is music, as Housman heard, in the names of their tributaries: Clun and Onny and Corve join the Teme above Ludlow; Ledwyche and Rea, both down from Brown Clee Hill, enter on either side of Tenbury. Evocative, again, are the names of the Lugg tributaries, Arrow coming in near Leominster, Hindwell by Presteigne. I have not covered all the length







*The very essence of the Border . . . fly-fishing for trout on the Usk near Abergavenny*

## *The Land of Teme and Gleam*

and breadth of the Border Country, yet this is a pool of names enchanting enough to compose a spell.

Before our eyes are set on a spreading ring under one of the million alders and our hopes on the passage of an artificial fly, let me dwell a little on another captivating part of Welsh Border fishing, the romance of the region's history. I once offered the editor of a weekly magazine an illustrated article to be entitled "Fishing with Owen Glyndwr". He disconcerted me by answering: "What evidence have you got that Owen Glyndwr was an angler?" I had to explain—and how laborious it sounded!—that I was proposing a topographical article on the Glen of the Dee, where Glyndwr was born, written by a fisherman constantly aware of its historical associations. Surely the boy Owen caught a salmon there in the Mount Pool right below the windows of his home, probably snatching it. Anyway, his unquiet spirit roamed there still, even at the elbow of an angler studying to be quiet. The editor gave a materialistic little grunt. He took the article in the end.

Most anglers appreciate the natural beauty around them; fewer have a waterside sense of history. Still less do they think of all the nameless others who, down the centuries, have been there before them, rod in hand. They share Walton's pleasure in primroses and nightingales; they might even welcome a melodious milkmaid. But they have no thoughts to spare for any "old Oliver Henly, now with God", however much of "a noted fisher both for trout and salmon" he may have been in his lifetime. They set no store by angling wraiths.

Walton ended his days in Hampshire and lies buried in the cathedral of Winchester, once the capital city of Alfred the Great. Yet I do not remember hearing of an Itchen dry-fly fisherman being deeply stirred by Winchester's wealth of history or having his pleasure in fishing the river enhanced by them. A. G. Bradley, that gifted, copious and loving writer on both the history and the trout of Wales and the Borderland, asserted flatly: "The dry-fly purist, I know, feels none of these things. Nay, he seems almost to resent their association with fishing. He does not understand." Perhaps Bradley was not wholly fair, yet much more interest seems to be taken in Walton's occasional visits to Cotton on the Dove than in recalling that he lived a quarter of his life in Hampshire. The chalk-stream precisian—and he has survived Bradley—is sensible of the kingcups and blackcaps but hardly of the mighty ghosts.

There is no ignoring the mighty ghosts of the Welsh Border. No, I have no evidence that a de Lacy of Ludlow ever angled in the Teme, or a Fitzalan of Scott's "Castle of Garde Doloureuse" in the Clun, or a Mortimer of Wigmore in the Lugg, or an Earl of Lancaster in the Monnow at Grosmont. But I, for one, could not fish in these parts without lifting up my eyes to their

## *The Land of Teme and Gleam*

castle eyries above the river and learning something of their story. And though no trace is left, it would be hard to fish the Lugg around Mortimer's Cross without thought of that February day five centuries ago when Edward Earl of March, as his army debouched from the wooded defile at Aymestrey, saw the portentous sunrise over the plain—three separate suns, the "Sun of York" with a vengeance! Thus Shakespeare:

*Edward:* Dazzle mine eyes, or do I see three suns?

*Richard:* Three glorious suns, each with a perfect sun,  
Not separated with the racking clouds,  
But sever'd in a pale clear-shining sky.

Vengeance it was indeed for the Lancastrians' ruthless victory at Wakefield. On the evening of that "obstinate, bloody and decisive battle"—and now I adapt Housman—"Lugg down to Leominster ran coloured with the death of man". The victor marched straight from the carnage to the crown in Westminster Abbey. It does take one's mind off the trout for a moment, doesn't it? It ought to.

Or pause on the bridge at Leintwardine a few yards below the place where the Clun, from the heart of Clun Forest, joins forces with the "Little Teme", fresh from the heroic Lady Brilliana Harley's Brampton Brian. From the confluence the Teme bears off the honour of the name which one might think should go by rights to the bigger partner. Here the Romans had their station at Bravonium, for at the ford their road crossed on its straight course all down the Border from Chester to Chepstow. Be sure the grayling were there then, for it is a fable that they were introduced by the monks of Wigmore or any other abbey.

But, as Walton exclaims, "whither am I going? I had almost lost myself"—in recollection of the age-old strife of the Border, "the Roman and his trouble", buried in the peace of its river valleys. Their story, romantic now, is like the "enamelled colour" of their trout; it enhances the charm of the fishing.

This is unlike the charm of the chalk streams, justly acclaimed by the whole corps of South Country writers. The chalk streams are fly-fishing water at its best and, in all senses, its purest. In general, Border rivers and brooks are not the clearest. The little Pinsley, by Leominster, spring-fed and spring-cold, is alone in being aquarium-bright. In all weathers the old *Field* river reports used to announce, week after week: "The Pinsley is in order". Alas that, a few years ago, wantonly careless hop-spraying should have poisoned 2000 of its trout.

But not often can you spy one of our Border trout "on the fin" and count its spots. Nor will it run to chalk-stream size. An astounding brace

## *The Land of Teme and Gleam*

came a while ago from the Lugg near Presteigne: together they weighed 10 lb. Were they taken on some "local lure"? I heard that both fell to wasp grub dangled in the June dusk. Anyhow, Presteigne will hardly look on a brace like that again.

Generally we count a pounder a trout to display. On the better-favoured waters in Mayfly time—if there is any Mayfly—you can set yourself a 12-inch limit, but this would be vain ambition on, say, the more acid upper Onny. There the brook's beauty under the Longmyd and among the Plowden woods must make up for its "twopenny trout".

Better fish inhabit more sluggish and clouded waters like the Corve, which flows between crumbly banks in a dairy-farming country. Different, though, is the valley of the Teme so far as Ludlow, where the Corve joins it. In dry summers up towards Knighton the Teme has a habit of going to ground in its stony bed. While the remnant of the stream continues underground, only isolated shrinking pools remain above. Some benevolent people will succour trout thus, as it were, marooned and convey them down river in buckets. Possibly some other persons are neither good Samaritans nor pass by on the other side.

Till a generation or two ago the Welsh border, like the Scottish, used to be reckoned wholly wet-fly country. The Little Monnow and its sister brooks were the home waters of that "terrific parson", Canon Charles Eagles, whose father was vicar of Longtown. When and where Canon Eagles was young, one did not put fish back. Once in five consecutive days' fishing at home he took 523 trout; his best day's bag was 145. One year the vicar and his three boys kept a record of the trout they caught; the number was 3,500. They thought that a lot, but next season their total was 5,500. Then they gave up counting.

Later Eagles used to fish the Teme and visit the Corve as guest of an Oxford friend. This was the father of the Rev. Edward Powell, himself, I think, the outstanding Welsh Border fly-fisher of my generation. He once told me: "Old Eagles was a venerated tradition in my family. My father, one of the best fishermen of his day, always spoke of him with bated breath as something uncanny." In old age the Canon once asked him if there really was "anything in all this dry-fly nonsense, m'boy."

Himself fishing a team of wet flies upstream, and casting with matchless accuracy on brooks so bushed that most men could not fish there at all, Eagles relied especially on a large Coch-y-bonddu of his own tying, which he fished as a bob fly. "Hit 'em on the ear, m'lad", he would say. The question was how he could see the fish at all. Mr. Powell thought he had *polarising* eyes. Certainly he showed genius. He is a "personality" along the Welsh Border still—shall I say a presence?

## *The Land of Teme and Gleam*

Nowadays on the Welsh Border we are all dry-fly fishermen. Few wet flies, I suppose, are cast there till trout go out and grayling come in. But if we are dry as they are on the Test, we are nothing like so pure. We cannot afford to make it a rule to wait for a hatch of fly and the ring of a rising trout. Nor are our fish so fussy. There are occasions, to be sure, notably Iron Blue days, when they *insist*, but often your favourite "whatnot" fly will serve well.

The region has its own long tradition of fly-dressing. At Ludlow more than 200 years ago the Bowlkers, father and son, produced the most popular handbook of angling ever written, bar *The Compleat Angler*. They brought the Golden Legend of fly-dressing into the Age of Reason, and away went those medieval patterns which Walton took over from Dame Juliana, never to be seen again.

One Bowlker pattern is the Orl Fly, a dressing of our Herefordshire Alder that can hardly be bettered on the Border after Mayfly time, or through it. The Georgian tie calls for "a dark grizzled cock's hackle . . . the body of peacock's harl, worked with dark red silk"—not so durable a body as the modern cock pheasant tail, but I prefer it.

Despite broiler plants, some grand roosters still catch the wandering fly-dresser's eye along the Border. To an old Leominster veterinary surgeon who tied deadly flies himself, I once remarked that in his country practice he had exceptional chances of getting stiff and brilliant hackles. "Yes", he agreed, "but I've ruined my digestion with eating old cocks."

By the death of E. C. Coombes, of Tenbury Wells—a cobbler in his spare moments—we lost a fine exponent of the Teme style of fly-dressing. His Blue Variant, a general-purpose Olive, is a pattern I would never be without. How many more dry flies need one carry usually in the Borderland? I will add half-a-dozen. And first, by right, the Rev. Edward Powell's Paragon, a universal sedge, tied with rabbit-face body and "henny" Rhode Island hackles, chocolate coloured. Then, both ever useful if stocked in two sizes, our Border beetle, Coch-y-bonddu, and the Double Badger, which stands for the diptera, if you must be so particular. For the frequent summer days of "persistent Black Gnatitude" carry also the Knotted Midge, and for summer evenings, partner to the Paragon, a small Pheasant Tail. For summer mornings have also a big Pheasant Tail, bushy and buoyant, to cast on a short line to the very head of stickles. And when you see a trout under the willows sipping down many aphis—as a post-mortem will confirm—a tiny Red Tag, a good trout fly, is as likely as a Green Insect to go the same way.

And now, with Walton, "I will by your favour say a little of the umber". However much of an alien immigrant in trout streams elsewhere, along the Border the grayling *belongs*. It is a native not without honour in its own

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country of Teme, Lugg and Monnow. When the cider apples are reddest, grayling reach their best.

Leintwardine has a front place in the literature of grayling fishing. Sir Humphry Davy was better at inventing a miner's lamp or presiding over the Royal Society than at writing Waltonian dialogue; still, his *Salmonia* gives a picture of grayling fishing at Leintwardine early in the nineteenth century which anybody who has been privileged to fish the water of that distinguished old club will turn to, I think, more than once. Sir Humphry's is another persistent presence.

On the Border we think foul scorn of Cotton's miscalling of the grayling "one of the deadest hearted of fishes". Ours just aren't. Cotton in his haste—"for it grows towards dinner time"—was speaking of May grayling; he makes some amends a minute later with "assure yourself a grayling is a winter fish". On Cotton's own water in Beresford Dale in autumn I have found large grayling markedly feebler than the Border tribe in the same season.

Declaring a high opinion of the grayling, Francis Francis admitted that in play "too often they behave as a trout might be imagined to do if he had been drinking success to the Mayfly rather too freely"—but certainly not dead drunk in St. Luke's Little Summer, or St. Martin's either. One needs a high regard for grayling to fish for them happily. Where trout and grayling have shared a stream since Creation, the grayling will not overrun the trout next year. I could never enjoy being a vermin-operator. But, that granted, it is good for once to be free to fill a creel without scruples about over-fishing.

Francis anathematised all bait fishing for grayling. With the so-called grasshopper at Leintwardine, he said, the slaughter used to be "positively dreadful". On the Continent today M. Charles Ritz and his school rank dry-fly fishing for large grayling above any trout fishing. During a hatch, certainly, the dry fly is the best, if not the most deadly sport. At other times on the Border you need to fish wet and deep; then leaded flies will kill most fish. Always you should fish fine, for grayling are extremely gut-shy.

For dry flies you might be content with some I have named already: Red Tag, Blue Variant, little Coch-y-bonddu and Double Badger. My favourite wet-fly team has Red Tag on top, then Brookes' Fancy, and on the point my own charming Witch, the Droitwich, or else a nymph-like Silver Twist; all dressed, for choice, on tiny double hooks. Brookes was a Ludlow postman; his Fancy has a body of purple silk and white hackle, palmerwise. The Droitwich's body is half peacock sword-feather and half oval silver tinsel; hackle, creamy badger; tag, orange wool.

Thus you will have filled the dozen compartments of your Border flybox.



MACDONALD HASTINGS

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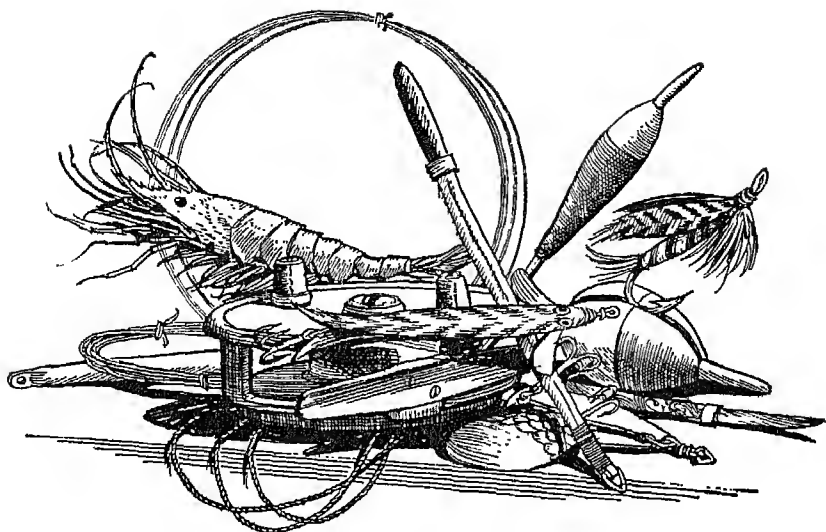
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*The Last Thames*  
*Salmon*



MACDONALD HASTINGS, famous television and radio commentator, is also a novelist and biographer of distinction. Has been editor of *Country Fair* and *Strand Magazine*, and was a war correspondent. Wrote the series of "Cork" novels which began with *Cork on the Water*, many books for boys such as *Eagle Special Investigator*, and the biography of Robert Churchill.



# The Last Thames Salmon

MACDONALD HASTINGS

IN MY FIRST novel I described the capture of the most notable salmon of the season 1949, a cock fish of 57 lbs. 3 ozs., taken on a No. 7 Hardy's L.W. Blue Charm. I called the stream in which the fish was killed the Edendale, a thinly-disguised union between the upper waters of the Helmsdale and the estuary of the Naver in Sutherland, N.B.

It must have been a convincing bit of fiction because, ever since, I have been asked whether it is correct that I have caught a salmon by fair fishing of over fifty pounds.

Ten years later, I wrote another novel in which I indulged myself in a fancy that it was on the night that Big Ben tolled disaster by striking twenty times at three o'clock in the morning that the last of the vanished race of Thames salmon ran up the river.

Inevitably, it has come about that I have seen it recorded in the correspondence columns of *The Field*, none less, that I, much worse, have asserted that the last Thames salmon came up on the tide of March 21st, 1861.

Thus are fishermen's tales born.

Writing as one who can truthfully say that he has caught two trout on one fly, and has recovered a prawn tackle from a fish which broke him,\* I don't want to be on the record as one of the liars.

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\* The second trout, going for the fly after the first had had it, tied the gut into a grannie knot under his gills. The salmon I lost struck me, after I had consoled myself with half a bottle of claret, on the first spin after lunch.

## *The Last Thames Salmon*

It is a fact that, from time to time, late summer fish in excess of fifty pounds have been taken in favoured rivers such as the Wye, the Aberdeenshire Dee and Tweed. It is credibly reported that, a number of years ago, a cock fish of 61 lbs. was trapped in the nets off the Kincardineshire coast. But a salmon of fifty pounds or over, anywhere in the British Isles, is a rarity.

It is a fragment of history that on March 21st, 1861, Big Ben startled Londoners by chiming twenty times at three o'clock in the morning. The superstitious did indeed forecast that it was a clanger of disaster to come. It is also correct, according to a computation kindly made for me by the Director of Liverpool Observatory, that on that night at the same hour the tide started to flow in Greenwich Reach. Whether that was the tide on which the last of the now vanished race of Thames salmon ran up the river is a matter of faith; like the story that, at one time, salmon were so prolific in the Thames that London apprentices used to have a clause in their indentures stipulating that they weren't to be fed on the fish more than two days a week.

While there is no direct evidence that the indentures of the apprentices ever carried such a clause, there is ample evidence that, up to the end of the eighteenth century, the Thames yielded such a harvest of salmon that it is only reasonable to suppose that people must have got fed up with eating them. It would be a matter for surprise if the apprentices didn't object.

But, by the first quarter of the nineteenth century, Londoners were already beginning to ask where all the salmon had got to. By the 'fifties there was serious alarm over the state of the "malodorous Thames". In 1861 a commission was sitting, ostensibly to find ways of bringing back the salmon; in fact, to preside over an inquest. The river was already dead.

According to Frank Buckland, the Victorian naturalist, the last salmon in the Thames was caught at Windsor in the 1820s by a fisherman named Fimmore. The fish made his lie at Surley Hall. When he showed above water the local netmen planned his destruction. The first attempt to catch him failed because the fish leapt triumphantly over the corks of the seine net. On the second attempt, another net was supported in the air to snare him as he tried to throw himself clear.

When he was grassed, he was offered to George IV, then residing at Virginia Water, who awarded the netter a guinea a pound. The royal bounty was twenty guineas.

The ichthyologist, William Yarrell, held that Buckland was wrong. Writing in 1836 in his *History of British Fishes*—still regarded as an authoritative work on the subject—he recalled that he had noted the taking of a salmon in the Thames in June, 1833.

But the most valuable information is contained in the minutes of the evi-

## *The Last Thames Salmon*

dence of the commission which enquired into the state of the salmon fisheries in 1860-61.

Mr. William Flynn declared that on Thursday, October 25th, 1860, he called on Mr. Charles of Pimlico, the fishmonger to the Queen, to see the 20 lb. fish alleged to have been caught at Erith in the Thames on October 23rd. He said that it was "in high condition"—i.e., fresh—but expressed a doubt as to whether the fish had been caught in the Thames at all. He gave no reason for his doubt but, in the modern phrase, implied that he had a hunch. He may have suspected that it came from the Medway.

In Mr. Flynn's opinion, the last salmon was taken at Blackwall about 1857. Asked how long it was since salmon were common he replied that, in the year 1816, the Thames had the greatest run ever known. Ninety fish were taken in a single morning. There was such a catch that they fetched only threepence a pound in Billingsgate Market.

The Secretary of the Thames Angling Preservation Society, Mr. Henry Farnell, gave evidence. He hadn't seen a fish in the river for thirty-six years although, in his youth, he remembered sixteen fish being caught in a single haul. In his opinion the last salmon was taken in 1829. He added, with significant emphasis, that the Gas Company had become active about 1820.

Mr. John Gould, F.R.S., said that there were plenty of salmon in the river about 1820 to 1823; in his opinion the last was killed by a Mr. Wilder off Monkey Island in 1830. Mr. Richard Lovegrove, of Maidenhead, a son and grandson of Thames fishermen, put the date somewhat earlier—between 1823 and 1824. He was probably referring to that part of the Thames he personally knew. He recalled that, in former years, sixty fish had been taken in a season at Boulter's Lock.

In the course of the enquiry, in which a succession of witnesses confirmed that salmon had been plentiful in the first fifteen years of the century, fascinating facts emerged.

One fisherman stated that the highest point of the river in which salmon had been known to spawn was the Mill at Basildon, near Goring. Another said that the salmon had disappeared because too many exhausted and foul fish had been offered for sale. These kelts were called "strikes". Grilse—one year-at-sea fish—were known as "harvest cocks". Samlets of a few inches in length were designated "skeggars". Shad, which had been common in the Thames, disappeared at the same time that the salmon disappeared. Asked why Thames fish were esteemed by Londoners, as they were, more than salmon from any other river, another elderly witness wisely retorted that they were better than Scotch salmon because they had not been dead so long.

In the conclusions of the Committee of Enquiry, it was decided that the major causes of the loss of salmon to the Thames were: sewage, discharges

## *The Last Thames Salmon*

from gas works and factories, poisonous drainage from mines, non-observance of close seasons, poaching and unlawful fishing, obstructions caused by weirs and stake nets; and, finally, navigation by steamers.

At this distance of time, it is interesting to analyse what the real causes were. Certainly the coming of the steamboat wasn't one of them; although the Victorians thought so. In fact, the propellers and the paddles probably helped to oxygenate the fouled water.

All the witnesses at the Commission of Enquiry were agreed that the Thames salmon diminished between 1810 and 1820; disappearing altogether somewhere between the 'twenties and the 'sixties.

The U-bend water-closet was invented in 1810. Until that time most sewage was emptied into cess-pools or pits. The solids rotted away and liquids were filtered through the soil before they reached the river. With the introduction of the U-bend, the sewage was flushed straight into the Thames. During the same period, the population of London rose from under a million to nearly three millions in 1861.

In 1858, Mr. Disraeli introduced a Bill to levy a special rate on the Metropolis for the purpose of purifying the river and completing the main drainage system, which it was hoped would make the lower reaches of the Thames fit to live beside again. The estimated cost was three million and the outlay was five.

Between 1858 and 1865, the great engineer, Sir Joseph Bazalgette, constructed the system to carry London's sewage to the outfalls at Barking and Crossness. The population was then about three million. Bazalgette reckoned on an increase to about three and a half million. It is a tribute to his genius that the sewage system he built is essentially the same system coping with a population of ten million plus today.

When the new outfall works were completed, and opened under royal patronage, it was believed that the waters of the Thames would be pure again. In fact, the situation mysteriously deteriorated. Only within recent years has it been discovered that the sewage effluent emptied into the river at the outfalls isn't carried straight down to the sea by the current. Pouring into the river twenty-four hours a day it rocks on the tide and pollutes the water up to the terrace of Parliament itself; that terrace from which some ass of a politician mouthed the sentiment that "The Thames is liquid history".

In the Middle Ages, Henry III kept a polar bear in the Tower, given to him by the King of Norway, which he used to turn out in the river to catch fish for its meals. In the reign of Edward III the Thames fishermen presented a petition to the Crown to prevent farmers in the upper reaches reducing the stock of salmon by shovelling fry for pig food. In 1758, a member of the City Corporation, a Mr. Binnell, could write that the Thames abounds with





## *The Last Thames Salmon*

salmon, large flounders, plaice, mullet, whiting, smelts, eels, perch, trout, carp, tench, bream, chub, roach, dace and gudgeons, besides oysters "of which these are the finest in the world".

As late as 1838 the minutes of the celebrated London angling club, the Piscatorial Society, announced a prize for the best salmon taken in the Thames. At that time the fish was a recent memory and still a pious hope. It seems definite that, up to the 'sixties, people believed that the salmon would come back. It is indicative of the obstinacy of the fish that, in the 1930s, five salmon were actually taken out of the Kent tributary of the Thames, the Medway.

In a hopeless endeavour to reintroduce the fish, Buckland and the Thames Preservation Society introduced fry at Hampton Court and other places. Between 1901 and 1909, more sowings of fry were made and Lord Desborough introduced Huchen salmon from the Danube at Taplow. None survived.

No fish could survive in the polluted water between Teddington Lock and Gravesend. As the population of London increased, more clean water was taken from the upper reaches for drinking and other purposes and, as a consequence, more was returned as sewage to the lower parts of the river. The claims of the power stations, which take out cold water and return it at such a temperature that the cleansing organisms can't get to work in it, aggravated the problem.

The situation today is that the lower reaches of the Thames are so poisoned that even a shrimp—an animal which I am told needs less oxygen than almost any living creature—can't survive above Gravesend. The water is so full of detergents that the paddles of the ferry-boats, which still ply across the river, stir it up until it foams like a washtub. In the summer the surface bubbles with the explosion of methane gas rising from the sludge. In hot weather, the brass on the ships coming into the Pool of London, and the brass of the officers' buttons, goes black in an hour or two. The poison in the water eats holes in the propellers of the river boats. Even chromium plate turns blue.

On those occasions, beloved of gossip writers, when young men coming out of the Savoy show off to their girl friends by jumping into the river in evening-dress to swim to the other side, the wonder isn't that they get across but that they get away with it without being infected with disease. It's probable that the children who still sport about under Tower Bridge have developed antibodies; but, theoretically, anybody who puts his hand in the lower reaches of the river is taking a risk. The Medical Officers of Health simply can't understand why there are not more cases of leptospirosis, or worse. Nevertheless, it is only fair to state that Londoners, in spite of the



## *The Last Thames Salmon*

"liquid history" on their doorstep, remain surprisingly healthy. But not London's river.

For fishermen, and not only fishermen, the pollution of water—the Thames is only one of the ravished rivers—is the dirtiest hangover of the industrial revolution. It is utterly unforgivable, unnecessary, uneconomic and, in a decent society, intolerable.

I should be happy to swap the nuclear deterrent, the Channel Tunnel, the next beastly jet aircraft, for the wonder of seeing beautiful animals in their element again.

Wouldn't you?



*There is no peace on earth like the peace of fishing in the early mornings.*

THE FLOATING LINE FOR SALMON AND SEA-TROUT, by Anthony Crossley

*He had been salmon fishing on a river in County Sligo, and was using the fly on a day when strong gusts of wind kept sweeping upstream with considerable violence. As he withdrew his fly preparatory to making another cast, a sudden gust blew the line across his face, and the fly hooked itself through his eyelid above the barb.*

*After cutting the gut as near the eye as possible, he walked into the nearest town and enquired as to the whereabouts of the local doctor.*

*He was eventually shown into a surgery, and sat there feeling far from his best, holding a handkerchief to his eye which was bleeding profusely. In due course the doctor came in and was told of the accident.*

*"All right", said the medical man, "take the handkerchief away and let's have a look at it."*

*He switched a light on to the patient's face, and after peering for a few moments at his eye, exclaimed in a shocked voice, "Man, sure that's the wrong fly you're using for this river!"*

COARSE FISHING IN IRELAND, by C. E. R. Sinclair

*The bass answers every requirement an angler can ask of a sporting fish.*

BASS: HOW TO CATCH THEM, by Alan Young

*The angler should always proceed on the assumption that a fish hooked is well-hooked. It increases confidence. I fancy a lot of fish are lost through timidity in handling. . . . If the rod is right and the line is sound it is astonishing how firmly fish can be handled on even the lightest tackle.*

FIXED SPOOL ANGLING, by Alexander Wanless

JOHN BAKER

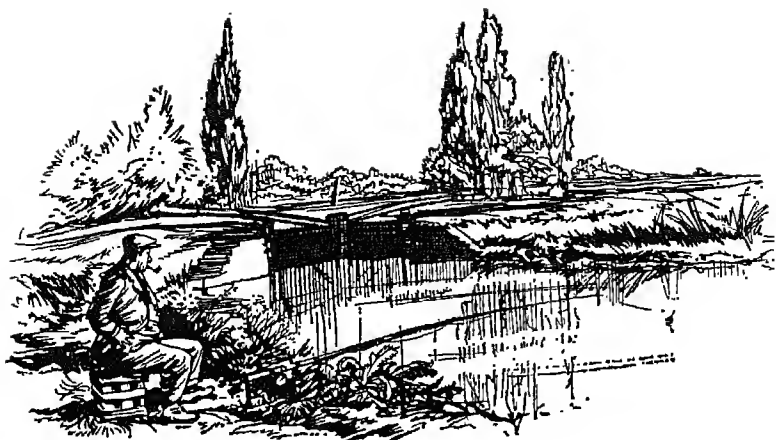
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*Fellow Traveller*

JOHN BAKER has been enthusiastically and idiosyncratically in the book trade all his life. His publishing and bookselling experience includes founding Readers' Union and Phoenix House as well as his own firm of John Baker Ltd. He has been seriously disturbed for many years by an addiction to the bucolic, and, after living in four cottages, has now settled down with his feet in the Kennet and Avon Canal. Author of *Cottage by the Springs*—an account of his attempt to make the best of both his worlds by putting a village pond in Wiltshire between covers. Drives a Rover 90 because, as he says, he has "always wanted a car which would do ten miles an hour in complete silence".



## *Fellow Traveller*

JOHN BAKER

YOU WILL have to put me down as a fishing fellow traveller. Until late in life, in my forties anyway, I had never caught anything larger than newts or sticklebacks; and living as I did in North London, the news that there were bigger fish and deeper waters had only vaguely reached me. In my part of the suburbs there were only polluted brooks and the New River, carefully screened from prying eyes by iron railings with sharp points. I had, in fact, lived unconscious of my doom, until I published Maurice Wiggin's "Fishing For Beginners". As I was to discover, you are a dry land man or a man aware of water.

At once, and sharply, I became conscious of fish. I became aware of the fishy element and of the dedicated men, and occasional women, who peopled it. I learned that there were newspapers, with circulations running nearly into millions, devoted to fishing. I began, for the first time, to notice shops whose windows were decorated with finely-shaped rods, reels, keep-nets, fishing satchels, and damp-defying coats and trousers. Lying in clutches were floats in variety and in gypsy colours. In packets were hooks of varying dimensions, some so small and delicate you could hardly see them and others large and gross, like the hooks you see in butchers' shops. A standard part of the equipment of these shops was a washbowl filled with writhing maggots. Inside these shops were happy and expert men and women who had done it and knew all about it, though when they had time to fish I couldn't imagine, for they were open all days of the week and Sundays too.

I refer to the coarse fisherman's shop. You will not find any of these

## *Fellow Traveller*

intimate things in those shops around Pall Mall, in which superior men, dressed in "morning clothes", condescend, between cleaning fowling-pieces and polishing decoy ducks, to sell trout rods and accompanying luxuries. The shops I mean exist more humbly, just above the flood-line, in shabby riverside streets and within breathing distance of the intoxicating flat smell of fresh water lapping around decaying piles. You can usually go straight from their rod-encumbered floor-space to your fishing station in a matter of three or five minutes.

Not that I did, for I wasn't so keen that I wanted to join the fishermen of Kingston, Teddington and Hampton Court, lining the banks in their hundreds. I restrained myself until I went to live near the Kennet and Avon Canal in Wiltshire. Joining the select Marlborough Fishing Club (at 15s. a year) I hastened to my destiny. The club's card, printed in petticoat pink, promised many delights. It contained seventeen intimidating rules concerning the rich variety of fish which, it seemed, were known to inhabit the canal—even trout and grayling were mentioned with confidence.

I gave full rein to my enthusiasm. I was at the Canal nearly every day. I sat in the sun, and in the gentle westerly rains. I was after those fish in a big way, with worms, maggots, paste, bread-crust, elderberries, bits of cheese and other unlikely temptations. I had fair bags of roach, perch, bream, dace, but, except on one remarkable occasion, no trout. I used to carry my membership card in my breast pocket hoping to be challenged by the water bailiff. In this I was successful, for he never remembered anyone and asked again and again, until the pleasure became annoyance. I sharply resented all whom I thought were poaching—the leather-clad motor-cyclists who, suddenly appearing, descended upon the quiet waters laden with so much paraphernalia that it must have needed a big effort to carry it. They spread themselves around, these pirates, they rolled their own in Golden Virginia, and they looked too tough to challenge. But they didn't catch any more than the small boy pirates with half-crown rods and worms for bait.

As the first winter drew on my enthusiasm got even keener. The frostiest days would find me on lock and bank, Wiggin's book in numbed fingers. I took my small nephew with me, aged eight or ten, thinking that he too should have the pleasure. He sat there looking miserable and blue and a bit tearful—which surprised me. On more than one occasion we broke holes in thick ice to fish through. Needless to say the fish were too stupefied or too surprised to bite. During this period I learned what different fish looked like; I talked knowingly to dry-land men about the behaviour of roach, perch, bream, dace, tench, pike, though, to be honest, I wasn't, early on, too sure.

It was marvellous to look into the deep, locked waters and see these glories of creation moving, turning, or just floating, in their watery world—sound-

## *Fellow Traveller*

lessly and remotely indifferent to humanity, to earth and to air. When I hooked one it was usually a bold perch. I was astonished at its perfection. Human beings are usually middling in looks and they all differ—they have big noses or small noses, for example, or they have pale or ruddy complexions. But not perch: they are all the same, except for size, all perfect, and all lovely, in grey-green and silver with astonishing subtleties of scaling, even to the pugnacious dorsal fin. They struggled, firm and muscular, on the grass, curiously boring their heads downward, until came the horrid job of releasing the hook, when they resisted vigorously for a moment and, as their vivid life faded, looked at me silently. I would have felt better had they screamed.

The worm, alas, was in the bud and not on the line. Anyone who begins to feel sorry for the fish will never make a fisherman. I had a kind of crisis on the day I caught my first and last trout. I had had a blank morning and was sitting on a lock gate which was the boundary between the open water and the prohibited "trout reach". Dreaming of a miracle I dropped my line on to the forbidden side of the gate. It was, of all vulgarities, baited with a large and tired worm. A miracle occurred. At once, without a second's delay, there was a tug, a rush and a flurry, and I found myself attached to a large trout. Feeling very guilty I pulled it out and laid it at my feet. I looked at it; it looked at me, and I thought that here was a chance to lift myself, albeit stealthily, into the fisherman's heaven—to catch a fat trout and to have it for breakfast next morning. But, lying there in its dappled splendour, I found it too beautiful to kill. It was sentient, pulsating, in the midst of life. Why finish it? I picked it up and dropped it gently into the Canal. It dived deep with a relieved swish of its tail.

On another day—a warmish October afternoon—I watched with mixed feelings a young man and a young woman fish a pool in which had for years secretly lived five large and noble pike. It was one of my favourite watching spots, for I had not the nerve or prowess to tackle these cannibal kings among fish. In two hours the pool was cleared and lifeless; and this likeable couple no doubt went home to a hearty tea.

Perhaps it was such incidents rather than any fixed crisis that made me drift into a situation in which I still carried my rod, but used my legs more. It was also partly laziness. As time went on it seemed a deal of trouble to put my rod together, and the commonplace mishaps and miss-hits of fishing irked me. I seemed to spend so much time taking resistant hooks from the texture of my jacket, untangling my line from weeds, and rebaiting.

I have mentioned that I had for years lived in waterless towns or in what estate agents call semi-rural positions; and what I saw before me now was so different; and a very great wonder. I was amazed to see clean water. It was so clear in the summer that you could look down several feet of glassiness

## *Fellow Traveller*

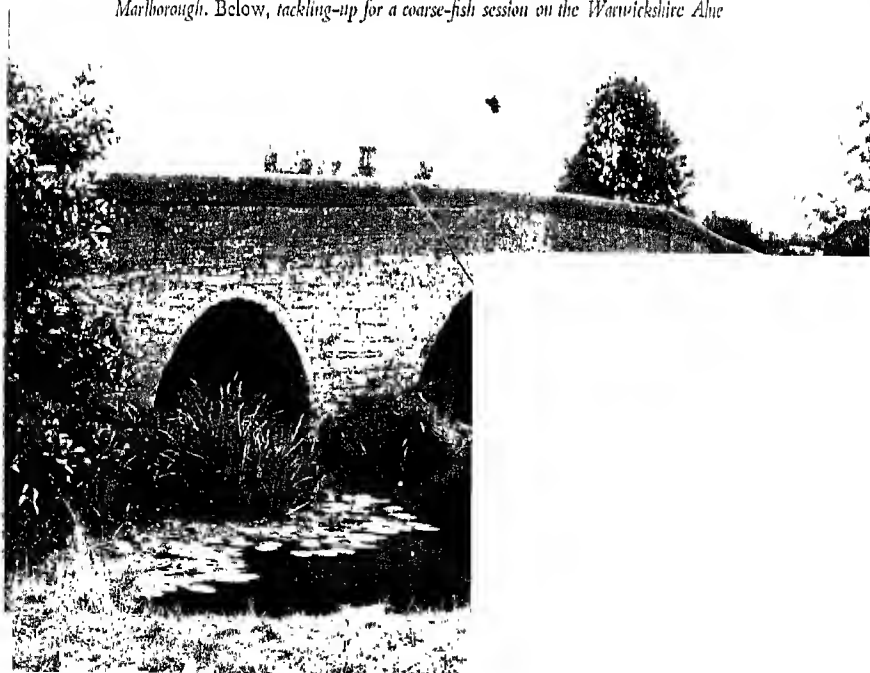
and see every weed on the bottom. Sometimes punctuating the view were monster fish of solitary habit, apparently ruminating on their fate but shewing no emotion. I was struck by the symmetry of pike as William Blake was stunned by the symmetry of tiger: the long eel-like body, shaped for speed; the cruel head shaped for murder. I watched a shoal of large roach at the tail-end of a weir rising and tumbling in play. I was incredulous at the clouds of small fry (a phrase I had heard but never, so to speak, seen). I lay on the grassy banks beside deep water-holes and watched vertiginously the barred perch moving, half-seen, along the bottom. This world of water was, for me, new, thrilling. It was quite apart from the earth below and the sky above. I found its constant movement, its mobility within its boundaries, its response to light and shade, its mystery, completely engaging.

I toured much of the forty miles of the canal next summer, with my rod. I was careful not to show too much of it in enemy territory. The Golden Carp lot from Swindon were very jealous of their stretch, which I must say was better than the Marlborough's—lots of fine, deep, weed-free reaches. It was as much as your life was worth to dip into their waters; and, from time to time, they descended upon them in charabanc loads. We Marlborough lot thought them a bit common, though it was hard to dislike so intense an enthusiasm. One of them told me (when I managed to break down his natural hostility to my using his towpath) about his ideal holiday, the holiday of his life, spent at a waterside cottage, without gas or electricity, *during which he was able to spend all of every day fishing.*

I made my way, piece by piece, all the way to Bath to the West and to Hungerford to the East, experiencing fabulous adventures on the way. I saw the original Watts beam engine at Crofton (over a hundred years old and still massively pumping) and its marvellous collection of tools. They were giants in those days, and thought nothing of hand-fashioning on the premises iron crowbars six feet long and spanners so heavy you could hardly lift them (and think of the labour of carpentering the massive lock gates by the dozen!). I visited the Limpley Stoke Pumping station. I stood on all the bridges, most of which lead oddly into fields, and gazed deeply into the canal waters. I saw the marvel of the twenty-nine locks at Devizes, and was astonished at the *bravura* of these canal builders, who did everything extempore, and never saw a blue-print in their lives. Had the Rennies thought while they worked they must have wondered what purpose the canal could ever have served; but they were too concerned with the physical problems, mostly the lack of water to fill the bed. Anyway, it got finished round about 1810 and their boast that they had joined the Atlantic Ocean and the North Sea, Bristol to London, was momentarily fulfilled. Romantics! They never made a penny profit from the first day; but here it was still, and mostly



*The ultra-sophistication of maturity, the innocent eagerness of the beginner—but the essence is the same. Above, dry-fly fishing on the aristocratic chalk-stream waters of the Kennet below Marlborough. Below, tackling-up for a coarse-fish session on the Warwickshire Alne*







#### ROACH

*The most ubiquitous, most angled-for fish in England. Most anglers start on roach; many ask no more. No fish is more beautiful; none harder to catch in clear water—roach of this size, at any rate. This bag of beauties represents the most-dreamed dream of the mostest*

## *Fellow Traveller*

holding water even though the last boat passed the canal's length in 1912. The engineering was indeed a marvel, and all the pumps and feeders and springs provide water without any modification of levels to this very day.

And then the G.W.R. bought the canal and the railway ran alongside, and when I was first there you could see every day the Torbay Express and the Cornish Riviera drawn by those gruff giants the Castle type locos; and every one of her crew including the driver and fireman waving kindly salutes to the fishermen but stiff with pride at their place in a crumbling society—the Torbay must go through!

I still find it difficult to believe that for the years of my life until manhood and maturity (and that would be getting on for fifty years) I had never, until I took up vicarious fishing, seen water-mint, water forget-me-not, the yellow water-iris, cowslips and violets, not to mention perfectly eatable watercress, growing freely and naturally in the wild. But, of course, such ignorance is possible, and even more so today, what with living in asphalt jungles and being transported between towns in cars, buses and trains. Even a lover of the country travelling along England's roads may well ask himself when he last saw even primroses and snowdrops and bluebells growing wild, as the word is. In the Home Counties, at least, wild flowers labelled "Common" in the handbooks are scarcely to be found.

My introduction to the art of fishing broke down the urban barriers behind which I had lived for many years; and, to my great benefit, I saw all these natural things freshly, almost I might say innocently. I saw coots, moorhens, the great and little grebes, and the magnificence of swans. I saw the heron flop heavily into the air. I saw him long-poised, still as stone, waiting to do *his* fishing. I saw the remnants of his bankside feasts—a few bones, a desiccated fishhead, an untidy mess of scales.

This my fishing gave me, and it was the most revealing experience of my life. Of course the first fine splendours have faded but the attachment to the canal ecology remains, even if the waters now seem shallower and muddier, if the fish seem fewer and smaller; and even if my fishing has lost its old single-mindedness.

I don't think the Marlborough Club will expel me. There's nothing in their rules which compels me to be a playing (or fishing) member, and in a way my kind can be an advantage to them—they don't have to re-stock on my account. In any case I shall carry my rod still, as a passport to the company of fishermen. If they are laconic rather than voluble, they also love the secret places, away from crowds and noise, those parts where the waters spread estuary-wise into broad and narrow reaches, and where you can spend an afternoon alone. They, too, are fellow-travellers.



FRED J. TAYLOR

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*Specialist Session*

FRED J. TAYLOR is one of the celebrated Taylor Brothers, who mean at least as much to angling as do the Beverley Sisters to light music. Tremendous specialist coarse fishermen, the Taylors—with their friend Dick Walker, often—camp for days beside delectable waters such as the Great Ouse and other eastern paradises. There are no anglers more serious about catching big fish and plenty of them—and few *less* serious in their joyous approach to life. Fred has written some splendid books, and here he describes the brothers' approach to one of their specialist sessions.



## Specialist Session

FRED J. TAYLOR

THE MODERN trend among anglers who set out in search of fish above a minimum prescribed weight, and who are usually referred to as "specimen hunters", is to set siege on a water and stay put for a weekend or several days. The advantages of this kind of approach are obvious. One is more likely to be at the water and fishing at a time when the fish are inclined to feed. It is unlikely that the fish will *not* feed at some time or other during a two- or three-day session, and while this feeding period may be of very short duration, the modern specimen hunter is almost certain to have a bait out in readiness for it.

All of this is very sound. One puts in a very long time fishing for some particularly difficult species in the hopes that one's vigil will be paid off with at least one good fish in the net. It is not everyone's idea of fun, however, and those who are not happy unless they are *actively* fishing would do well to steer clear of it. Those who want to see a float go under every few minutes irrespective of the size of fish responsible will not be suited to this kind of fishing. Unless one is prepared to settle in and fish in a manner likely to cause the least disturbance and with a style designed to avoid small fish, there will be no enjoyment in it for anyone. A fidget will make life unbearable for the rest of the party.

This does not mean, however, that a weekend's carp fishing, for instance, has to be a deadly grim, do-or-die affair. It does not mean that carp anglers

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and other specimen hunters are a serious-minded lot with no thought in their minds but the capture of fish at all costs.

My brothers and I have been referred to in print as a "joyous crew", and I believe this is a fair description. We take precautions when we fish with a particular object in mind, but these precautions are only elementary ones which ought to be applied anyway. We enjoy our fishing and we usually catch fish which is as it should be. It is wrong to think, as some folk do, that serious specimen hunting is a dour and unrelenting struggle between the angler and the fish. If it were so, I do not believe either my brothers or I, or any of our many friends, would be interested any longer.

There are many who have given up serious carp, tench and other big fish hunting, because they have believed success to depend upon an ability to throw out a big bait and wait and wait, tense and poised, until a fish of monstrous proportions came along and devoured it. After several weekends of lack of sleep, headaches because of intense concentration, indigestion because of badly cooked or hastily eaten food, or colds through sitting out in wet or inadequate clothing, they have become disillusioned and will have no more of it. Which is a pity really, because a little attention to detail would have made their fishing so much more enjoyable. This applies especially to carp fishing which demands more from the angler than most forms of fishing.

One of the first essentials, when a weekend's stay at the waterside is intended, is the establishment of a headquarters. This is usually in the form of a tent which will sleep the whole party if necessary. My brothers and I have an army bell tent which we bought very cheaply about five years ago. It takes up a bit of room, but it is well worth the trouble of carting along. It is easy to erect—we have done it many a time in pitch darkness and in heavy rain. It will keep out any weather these isles can inflict upon it and it is big enough to accommodate all our goods and chattels. If the weather is exceptionally bad, we can keep the entrance clear and do all our cooking inside. Usually, however, we establish a "cookhouse" a short way away under a hedge or tree, making use of three large umbrellas to provide shade or shelter from rain. Our food, cooking utensils and stools are left under the umbrellas at night; food such as bread, etc., which rats may find, is lifted off the ground.

Depending on just where we are fishing our "cookhouse" is powered either by a fairly large gas cylinder and two rings, or three small, self-contained gas cookers. (Spirit stoves are definitely "out" since I took a swig of methylated spirits one night thinking it to be mineral water, and spent the most uncomfortable night before going to hospital with a burned throat next day!) Obviously a lot depends on just how near to the headquarters

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one can drive the car. If a long walk is necessary, small stoves, a minimum of water and possibly three small tents instead of the big one are taken.

Some disturbance is unavoidable when setting up headquarters, but I believe it is better to get it all over at once. Unload everything, pitch the tent or tents and have everything to hand as soon as possible. Don't leave anything in the car to "take out later". If you do you'll find it necessary to show yourself when you don't wish to or you'll slam the boot down when you should be keeping quiet. The only thing I leave in the car is a change of clothing in case of emergency.

Having set up headquarters and decided on fishing pitches, comfort should be the next consideration. One should be able to *fish* in comfort and one should be able to *sleep* comfortably. When and where you sleep doesn't matter so much. What is important is that you *do* sleep. It may be that after a night's carp fishing you prefer to curl up in the shade of a tree—or lie in the sun for a few hours. Or you may decide that the warmth of a sleeping bag at two o'clock in the morning is infinitely better than sitting out fishing in a gale! Be prepared for the worst and you'll enjoy the best even more. I would rather cut down on bait and groundbait than on bedding! There is nothing worse than a night spent on the cold hard ground with insufficient covering. Whatever else we lack, my brothers and I have adequate bed rolls. Each one has a sleeping bag, a blanket bag, an inflatable air-bed and a waterproof outer cover with a flap that covers the face. We have slept out in them and awakened with a covering of frosty rime in the morning—but we have kept warm inside them.

At times the bed roll can be used in the pitch itself rather than in the tent. In this way it is possible to fish through the night and be awakened by electric bite alarms attached to the rods which are placed one each side of the bed roll. But, generally speaking, this is not a good idea. It is excusable on extremely difficult waters where one hopes for but one bite during a season; but it is advisable to sit up and fish through the night on most carp waters. If you feel that it is essential to fish every hour of the day and night, arrange some sort of watch system whereby someone is awake with the rods while the other sleeps. And if you *have* fished hard all night be sure to sleep during the day. I have known anglers, reluctant to miss an hour or two during the day, fish on until the second night. Then, when the only bite of the weekend came, they were too tired to react and deal with it.

My brothers and I do not pay any attention to time while we fish. Each one of us eats when he's hungry, drinks when he's dry and sleeps when he's tired.

One of the best pieces of cooking equipment we own is a non-stick frying pan which cooks with an absolute minimum of fat. Bacon frying in the



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morning air may smell delicious, but it is all the better if it is not swimming in a pool of grease. Non-stick pans allow food to be served daintily too, for there is no reason why food cooked out-of-doors should not be attractive to look at as well as eat.

Tinned foods are necessary, of course, if the stay is to be one of several days, but fresh meat and vegetables can be taken to last over the weekend. Meat pies, cooked at home, are another nice change from the monotony of tinned "bangers" and beans.

And don't forget of course that the countryside can often supply you with some additions to your normal fare. Mushrooms, watercress, blackberries, crayfish and eels (to name a few) will often liven up an otherwise uninteresting meal.

One doesn't have to be a chef in order to be able to make use of the food which the countryside has to offer. It's largely a matter of common sense and all anglers ought to be able to recognise the various foods and the seasons when they are available. Years ago, the mushrooms might have caused some confusion, but as these can now be seen in every greengrocer's shop in any part of the country they should be easily recognisable.

They are usually available in the countryside in the months of June and September. There may be slight overlaps depending on the weather but generally speaking one expects to find them only at these times.

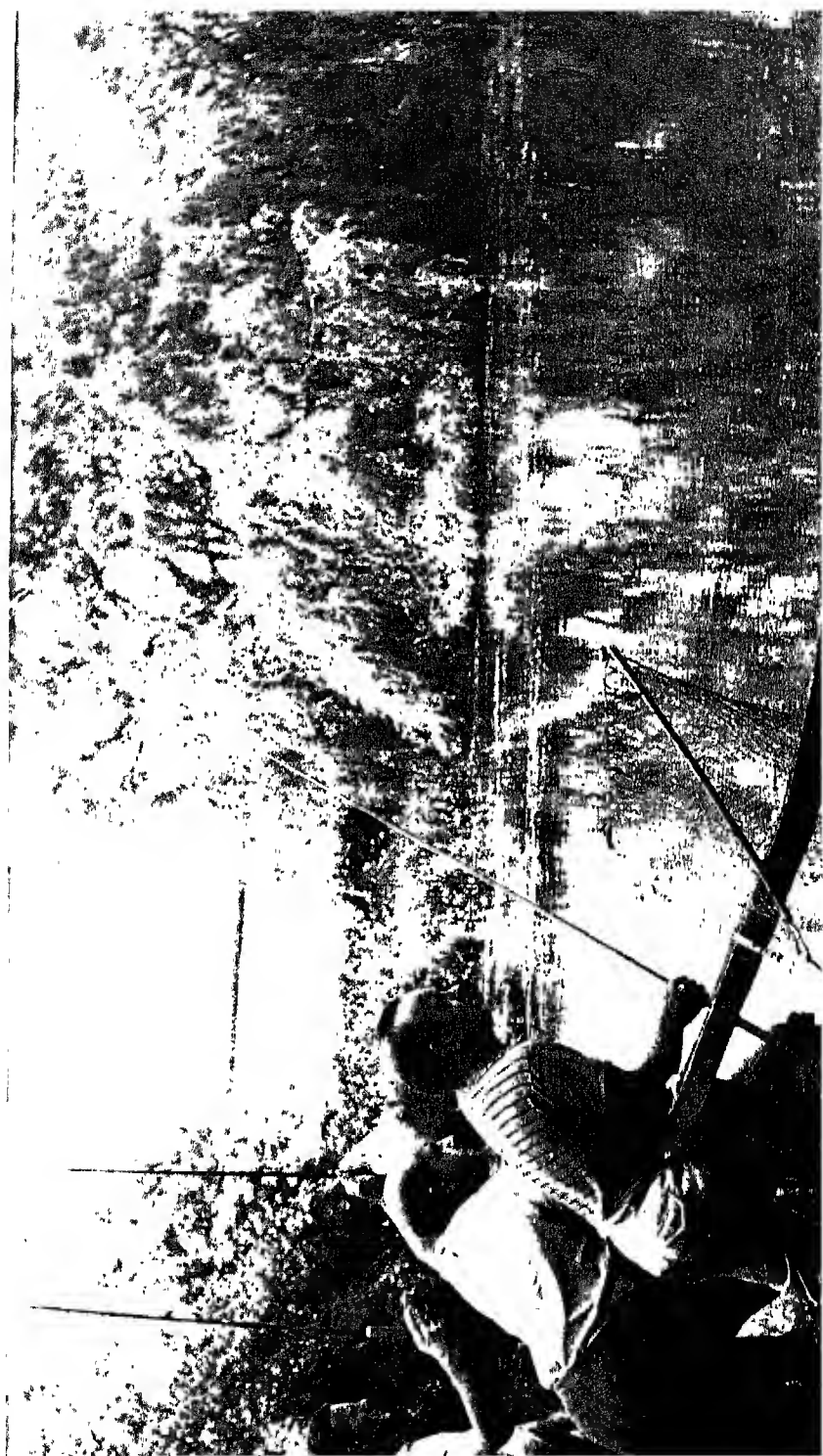
Other fungi are available throughout the summer and autumn, but unless you are absolutely familiar with them, it is advisable to leave them strictly alone. Very few fungi are deadly poisonous; (those that are usually have an unpleasant smell) but there are a number which can cause sickness and nausea. There are others which, though perfectly edible, are too rich for sensitive stomachs and cause vomiting. The scaly mushrooms, which are delicious, affect me in this way and I have to leave them alone—reluctantly.

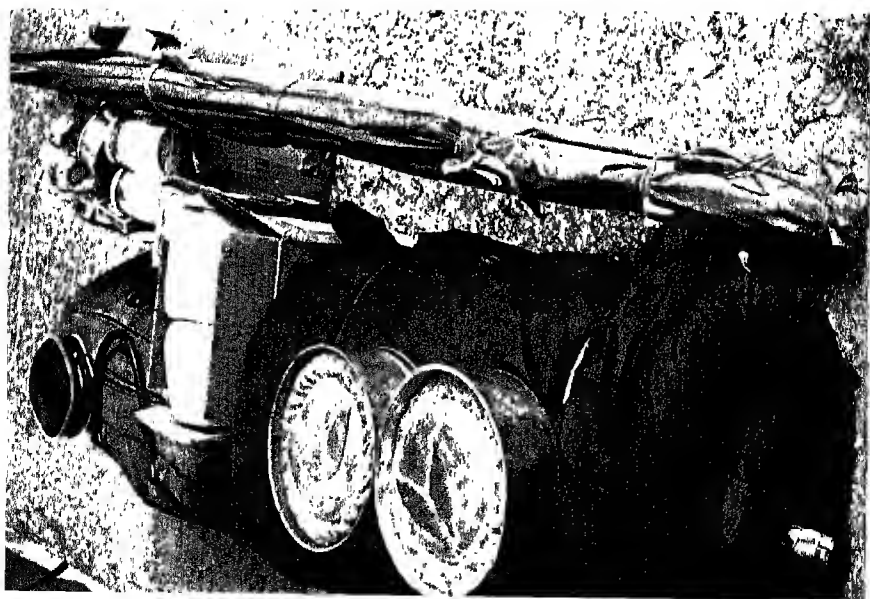
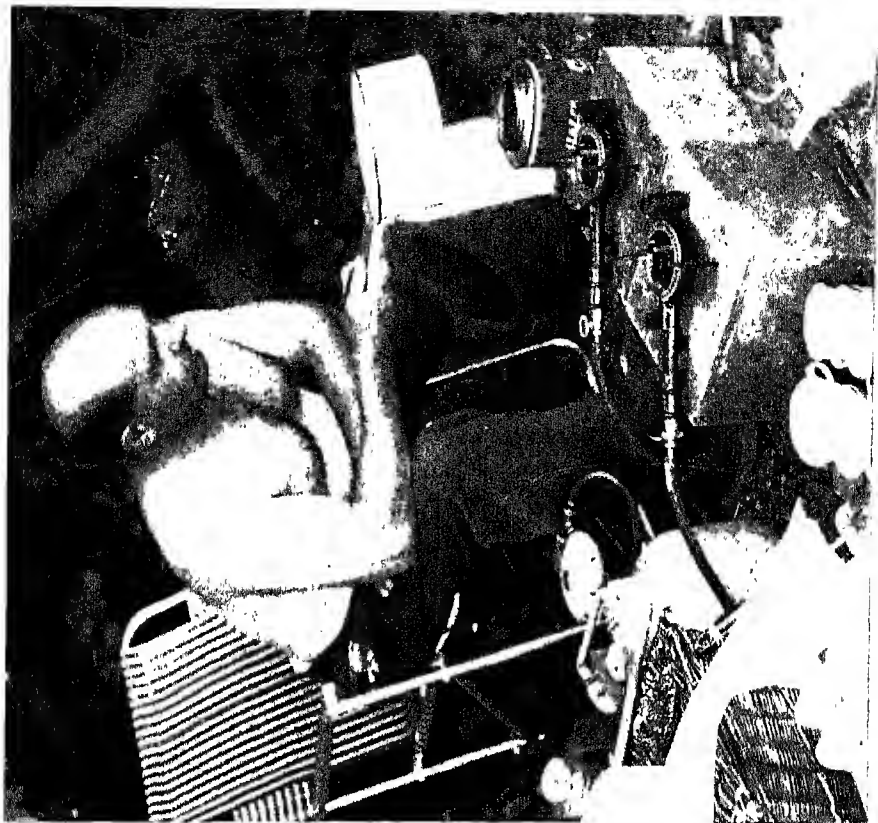
My advice is to stick to the well known common mushrooms and if there is any doubt at all, leave them alone!

Watercress, to be good and palatable, should come from a running stream and not a still water. An old country idea is that watercress is in season when there's *not* an R in the month. Certainly it's at its best then.

Crayfish are only found in lakes and rivers which are extremely pure. At the first hint of pollution crayfish begin to die off, and the waters containing them in this country now are all too few. Where they abound, however, they are good food. September is regarded by some as the *only* month in the year when they are fit to eat, but while they are possibly at their best then, I can assure you that my friends and I have eaten them all through the summer months.

I suppose everyone knows how to acquire crayfish by turning over stones





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in shallow waters or by searching in their holes in the bank. But this is a slow game if you want enough to eat!

The best way is to use a crayfish net—or several nets. You can buy or make wire framed, round crayfish nets, or you can do it the easy way like I do. I use a square foot of small mesh wire netting and tie a string to each corner. These lead up to a single string which is used to lower the net into the water.

The net is baited with a piece of fish, meat, or offal beforehand.

Using several nets at close of day a large bucket may be filled in about twenty minutes. One just leaves them immersed for about three minutes and then lifts them out in rotation, picking off the crayfish which by then are usually attacking the bait.

To cook, one simply tips the lot into boiling salted water! And by salted I mean containing about ten times more salt than you would expect to use! It has to be almost a brine solution to impart real flavour to the fresh water crayfish.

The legs (claws) and tail segments are the only edible portions and it's advisable to take hold of the tail end and give a twisting pull before breaking open the shell. This action removes a thin, black gut-tube and leaves the complete tail clean and wholesome.

Is it all worth it? Of course it is, as long as it will in no way frighten fish or interfere with the sport of others. You must be the judge of this yourself. Obviously, unless there was another water nearby which would provide the crayfish, one would not practise these goings on at a carp water where the disturbance would put the fish off.

Very few carp waters, however, contain crayfish. But they nearly all contain eels and, during the day when carp are often uninterested in food, eels can be caught on simple carp tackle and small, dead fish baits. Skinned and cooked they make a very welcome extra to the otherwise monotonous fare of the angler who spends several days at the waterside.

There are many anglers who like eels as long as they do not have the trouble of preparing them for the pot. It's the skinning of them that causes the trouble as a rule and I've watched some funny antics by inexperienced "eel skimmers" at times.

In fact, skinning an eel is a simple operation. You simply take a sharp knife and cut the skin round the "neck" so that the skin only and not the flesh is cut into. Then tie the head end to a fence or tree (or get someone to hold on to it) and grip the neck with a piece of rough towelling or sacking. Pull firmly towards the tail and the skin will come off cleanly and easily. From then on it's a simple matter to clean and portion the flesh before cooking it.

There are many ways of doing this but probably the simplest and most

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popular is to season and stew it (in a minimum of water) until the flesh falls from the bones. Remove the bones, let the whole thing jell overnight and then eat it cold with some of that watercress we've been talking about.

I could go on and on about this sort of thing because it is part of my enjoyment while I'm at the waterside. All too often, in the rush to get back to the fishing, meals are half cooked, smoked, burned and eaten hastily. Precious fishing time must not be wasted cooking meals which require long preparation and cooking times.

But it is a mistake, and I've managed to convince my friends of the wisdom of sensible eating on these excursions. Trouble is, that unless I'm with my brothers only, I am invariably given the job of dealing with the catering and cooking while my friends carry on fishing until I yell "come and get it!".

Any attempt at rebellion on my part results in the most ghastly concoctions being served up by the others, until in self-defence, I am forced to do the job myself again!

But in a way I'm glad, because there's an added pleasure in it for me. I enjoy cooking trout, grayling, perch, etc., with the breakfast bacon.

I like the smell of water-mint in a panful of new potatoes. How many would even think of picking water-mint for the potatoes? It's an old idea of B.B.'s, passed on to me through Dick Walker, and I've always been glad of it. I've even taken water-mint home to use for a change from garden mint, on occasions.

I have not discussed any fishing here because this outdoor life doesn't apply to any particular branch of angling. It can be practised with any branch of the sport and certainly makes it more enjoyable.

I've cooked trout over a driftwood fire in Scotland, and crayfish in the south of England; and I wouldn't like to say which I've enjoyed most.

My friends and I have had some success with every species of fish with the exception of the lesser known catfish and pike-perch (which are not native fish anyway) because we have spent long hours at the water paying attention to detail and observing the habits of various fish. That we've enjoyed it so much is because we've paid particular attention to personal comforts and removed much of the monotony usually associated with "camping out". I believe it's helped us to catch more and better fish too.



*It seems strange that we gaily carry out full tins, full bottles and full sandwich packets, but absolutely rebel at the idea of carrying home the empties.*

MY WAY WITH SALMON, by Ian Wood

JAMES CADELL

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*Man of the Ponds*

JAMES CADELL lives in an isolated old cottage near the loneliest stretch of the Sussex Arun. If he catches a pike, he stuffs it with herbs from the garden. He keeps seven cats, at least. Devoted in the imagination to vintage cars, he actually rides a vintage two-stroke motor-bike, rolls his own cigarettes, has only just bought a TV set, and as late as 1961 was managing perfectly rationally without a wireless, as he calls it. Commercial ambition led him into the wine business in his teens, but a spell of clerking in Lyons persuaded him to turn his mind in other directions, and he armed himself with a belated Oxford degree. A mixed bag of a career followed—motoring correspondent, novelist, film writer, Intelligence in the army, Culture with a capital C, and, speaking professionally, Crime. Much in demand as a translator. His angling ambition is to take the first sword-fish out of Mount's Bay, where he spent his earliest years. He'll be lucky. . .



## Man of the Ponds

JAMES CADELL

IT WOULD BE putting it politely to say that I was not a great reader as a boy. I was a non-reader, an anti-reader; I had an aversion from books which amounted almost to an instinctive distrust. For my money, it was the river-bank and a fishing rod. I felt they had more to teach me. Sometimes (along with my fisherman's lunch of bread and cheese) there was a volume of Lamartine or Shelley in my pocket. But for the most part, I sternly resisted even that.

I was a late developer. At an age when my cousins—the usual prodigies—had devoured Dickens and Thackeray by the set, and one had even begun to write books of his own, I was still trying to summon up enough interest in *The Black Arrow*, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, the mammoth volumes of Henty and all the other fourteenth-birthday presents from well-meaning aunts, to pass from page one to page two. I couldn't. I was daunted by the end of the first paragraph. Not for me the printed word. I went fishing.

But even I could not avoid books altogether. At that time I was generally sent to my grand-parents for the holidays and my grand-father, an old, dear, frail failure of a man, could do very little but read to pass the time away. Consequently he had books by the hundred, all but the black-sheep among them of a mildly humorous nature. He put me on to *Potash and Perlmutter*, Artemus Ward, O. Henry and the *Reminiscences of an Irish R.M.* Alas, to me they were just so much print. He tried me with the *Conquest of Peru* (or was it Mexico?): still closer print. In a final effort to rescue me from illiteracy, he got me to work on a manuscript in brown and faded copperplate which



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contained his own unpublished account of a visit to Cuba in the turbulent year 1871; for, in the best Victorian tradition, he had once run away to sea. It was no use. I still went fishing. The sum-total of my teen-age reading amounts to four books: *De Profundis*, *Coral Island*, *L'Homme à L'Hispano* and a Hardy's fishing catalogue for 1893.

It scarcely takes a psychologist to say what these volumes had in common: *escape*. Of all the multitudes of books ever written, these alone seemed to have been written for me, and I must have read them forty or fifty times. I would have bartered my soul, I would even have given up my fishing, to exchange the miseries of boyhood for the oakum-picking solitudes of Reading gaol, or the green paradise of a South-Sea island. The Man with the Hispano gave the small boy with a dictionary so defined a taste in motors that no car, to this day, seems quite real to me if it is less than thirty-two horse-power or made later than 1929. And yet there were times when even these three masterpieces seemed mere *books*. Hardy's Catalogue alone was real. By the side of it, they were so many child's night-lights held up to the morning sun.

This was the one volume I loved. I remember coming across it one wet, cold April afternoon, among the torn and tattered books which, denied the meagre shelving of a small cottage, were relegated to the floor of the old junk-room. Forty years ago now, or as near as makes no matter, but I can still feel that thick, glossy paper under my thumb, and the tickle in my nostril (in those days I seemed to have hay-fever all the year round) from the dust of ages disturbed at last. I can still see the illustrations of those magnificent rods of hexagonal Palakona centred with silver-steel. I can still remember the prices quoted for rods built to special order in one flawless piece. The testimonials at the foot of every other page are still before my eyes, in their smaller, modest print, and I remember curious details about supplies of bait. But there are pages even more vivid to me. These are—or rather they were, for my coveted catalogue mysteriously disappeared in 1932—the ones containing the advertisements for hotels.

It was these that really set me dreaming. In this harsh world, whose felicity was strictly limited to fourteen weeks a year, could it be that some fortunate breed of mortal set out, no doubt in a white Hispano, for these fairy-castles in Scotland and Norway with twenty-five-guinea salmon-rods and thigh-length waders, guaranteed to withstand the heaviest torrents (see testimonial) at thirty-three-and-sixpence a pair? The palaces of the Far North were unillustrated: I could only picture them as some sort of fishermen's Valhalla, grey bastions under skies dark with crows. But the ones in Scotland—there they were, a half-page photograph, crag and turret and banquetting-hall. You could almost hear the reels running out (four-inch diameter, 95s. 6d.)

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to the skirl of bag-pipes. I particularly remember the phrase which occurred more than once: "magnificent lavatories". I pictured some vast atrium in coloured tiles, lined with uncracked basins where four-inch-diameter taps always ran scalding hot, and a race of soaked and frozen supermen exchanged heroic tales of the one that got away, as the pipes gurgled and the magnificence filled with a steamy miasma smelling of Pears' soap. Then they moved on to the banqueting-hall, to eat their own thirty-pound catch.

Every boy has his heroes, and his own private vision of the rich and great. These phantom fishermen, not male alone—for half the gear Hardy's made had a "Ladies Model", and they turned out a great deal of Ladies' Garb—were mine. Six times a year I passed through Euston station. I began to see more than grime and gloom. I awoke to the existence of the Scots Express. Among the ordinary passengers, I would see men in kilts and magnificent purple checks, women in super-waterproof tartan cloaks (they were always called Arabella, because it was an Arabella who had written one of the testimonials) and ghillies equipped with Hardy's best-quality gaff, in 1893 a mere 6s. 6d. The other day I happened to be at another of these stations-for-the-north, St. Pancras, whose turreted red-brick castle has been converted from a hotel into offices. I am told that the people who work there are something to do with British Railways, but they were pale shades of actuality by the side of the phantom fishermen of 1893.

What my poor grandfather was doing with a Hardy's fishing catalogue I often used to wonder, and a certain instinctive reticence or sensitivity prevented me from ever asking. I never mentioned it to him. But I strongly suspect that he had once burned to join the phantom fishermen himself, for one day he came out with the telling revelation that it had always been his ambition to have a hundred pounds to go into Hardy's with. I doubt if he ever had five. His "silver-steel-centred Palakona" was still, in fact, the monstrously heavy greenheart of his own early years (though with it he could pick out a leaf on the opposite bank). And on the very few occasions when he came fishing with me, it was only pond, float and worm.

But from far less generous motives, I was forced to guard my precious find from my grandmother too. Fishing was not a safe subject. Of course, my grandmother was glad enough for me to go fishing; she never ceased to marvel that a little solitary like myself should be so wonderfully capable of finding his own amusement for hours at a time. She never failed to cut me the most wholesome sandwiches, and once I could swim, I was allowed to go anywhere so long as I was back before dark. I used to get up at four to go after carp. It was reckoned to show some kind of virtue. But fishing as fishing, especially when carried into the home, had none, and the reason was not far to seek. A whole variety of factors combined to unseat my grand-

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father from the affluent Victorianism he had expected to be only his due. My grandmother, with a simplicity which increased with age, bundled them all together, and to her there was only one villain-of-the-piece: fishing.

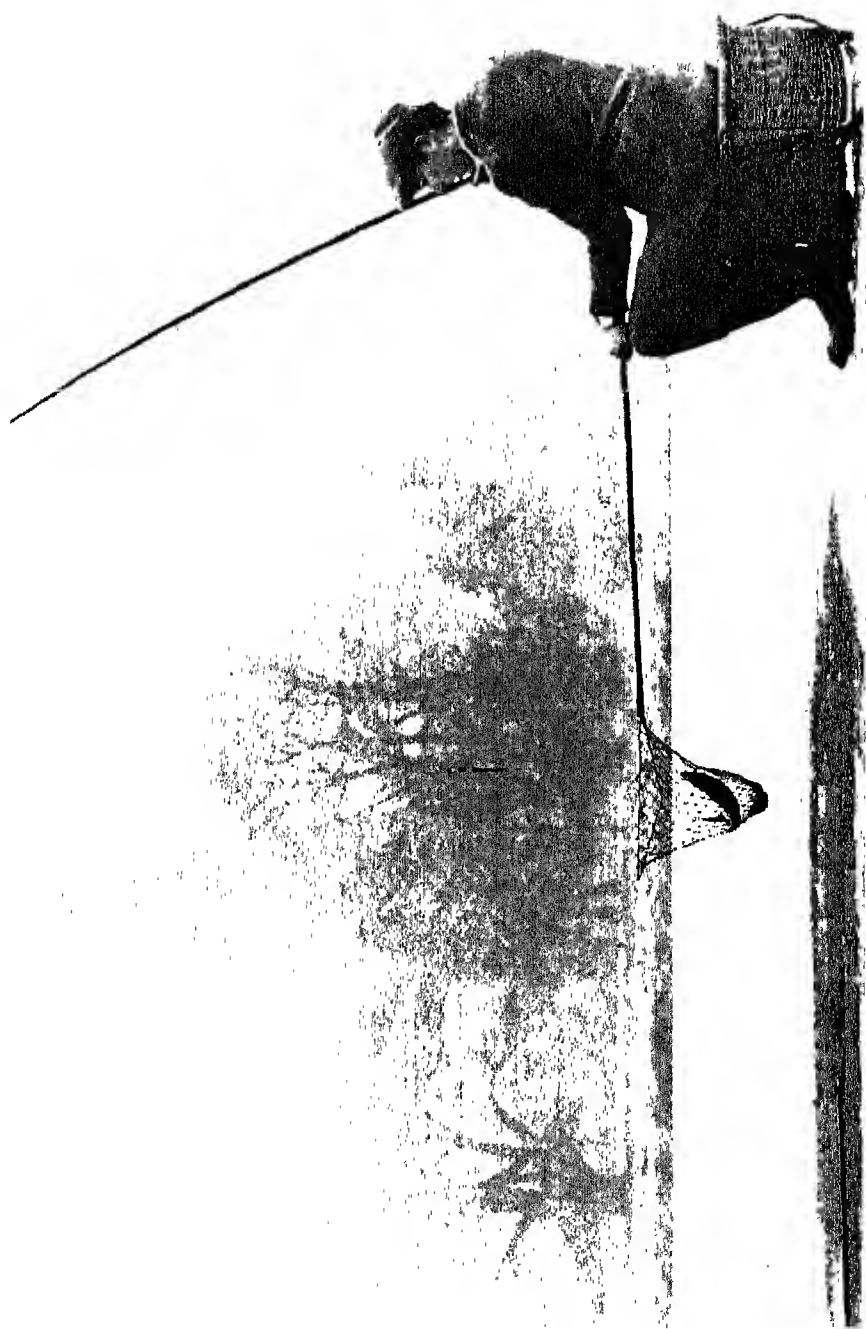
It is perfectly true that fishing interested him where more serious things did not. She lived in dread that it might interest me to the detriment of all else. But then it seemed to be a family failing. There was the skeleton of a still greater scoundrel in the cupboard, and when my grandmother was safely out of ear-shot, grand'pa would often rattle his bones. Some old parson great-uncle of his had gone through life scarcely able to set down his rod for long enough to spend an hour in church. He kept all his sermon-notes in his creel, and twenty minutes before preaching time could always be seen at, or half in, a near-by lake, scratching his head over a hundred scraps of paper which he had sorted out from under his catch. It was more by luck than judgment that he never produced a live fish along with them in the pulpit. Nor could it ever be said that the scales fell from his eyes, for as he rubbed up his spectacles with hands he never gave himself time to wash, the spectacles collected them. His life was an angling saga. We still had his Bible—an Izaak Walton prudently concealed.

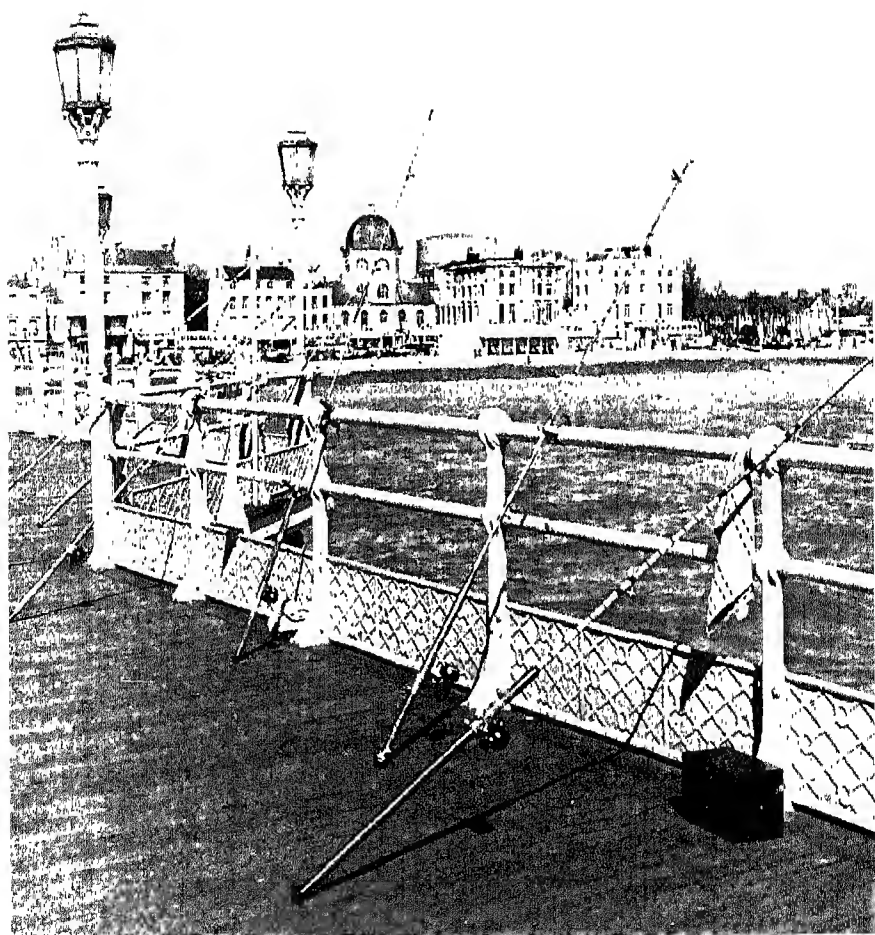
"Fishing!" my grandmother would sometimes sniff, as if it were some grand-scale evil which merely comprehended the evils of drink, gambling and worse. "You won't get very far in life by fishing."

This probably accounted for my earliest ambition to write for the *Anglers' News* and *The Fishing Gazette*. I should dearly have liked to be a highly-paid "Our Angling Correspondent". I never became one. But what's in you has to come out. I called my first novel *Live-bait*, and followed it with three more, all with titles of what one critic described as "piscatorial inspiration".

I could not keep my fishing dark as a boy, but I found it more tactful to soft-pedal my enthusiasm. (And, absurd as it is, I suppose fishing still has for me that aura of fascination which those who know about such mysteries call guilt.) But an enthusiast I certainly was. I was at it from dawn to dusk, and I regret to say that even after that, my night-lines were fishing for me.

I was a pond fisherman. Force of circumstances first. The only near-by river meant a charge of a shilling a day, which would have eaten too deep into my humble pocket-money, and I was one of those timid souls who are never comfortable trespassing. So I went from pond to pond: but I soon found them so fascinating that I never wanted to turn away. When my ritual visits to granny's ended for a while, I fished for mackerel and pollock in the south of Ireland, and I saw, though I never fished it, a river mightier than anything I had imagined, even in phantom-fishermen's land: the Rhone. But these mighty waters palled in mere months. Ponds were my first love,





*For whom the bells toll . . . easy-going anglers of Worthing Pier are taking it quietly in deck chairs just out of camera. The bells on the rod tips will call them if there's any danger of catching something*

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and now, living in a part of the country that has none, I still feel it to be incomplete.

Ponds are the real adventure. Ponds, be they ever so humble and not three miles from home, can give you a thrill of discovery, a sense of secrecy beyond the greatest lakes or rivers. I do not mean great sheets of water like Vachery or Frensham, or even the Hammer Ponds, though there are some beauties among the last named. No, I mean just a water-hole, fifty yards across and seemingly huge if it is a hundred, half-hidden in a wood perhaps or easily missed in the fold of a lonely field, often too insignificant even to bear a name. But what infinite variety among them. I have only to close my eyes, and all the ponds of my boyhood come back: rill-clear with wavy weeds, floating up at you like green cigarette smoke, where you could see the perch take your living little wriggle of silver four foot down: crusted with a scab of duckweed so thick that it soon filled in the little brown oasis round your float: wave upon endless tiny wave of a sepia sea; rainbowed with sheep-dip, gloss-green with night, shallow and sprouting with willow, shrouded with a tangle of tree and thin-leaved thorn thick enough to turn Nyæra's head into a billiard ball—that is how I see them, the close-ups first, the water under one's own continual stare at a red quill or a paternosterer's line and rod-tip. Then, in the long view, joyous ponds and gloomy ponds, ponds beckoning to you with a great curved sword of silver with a fir-tree at the hilt, ponds covered with water-lily and the air of some pleasaunce in an old engraving: ponds in twos, ponds in a chain of three, with a fourth just like a dew pond tagging on. Great solitary ponds where the carp must go twelve pound if only you could get down through the trees to fish them, ponds like pits with a mysterious reputation for eels ever since that dry summer of 1921, where you had to fish from a bank ten feet high: ponds that were nothing but rushes on the horizon, containing nothing but a deformed tench or two. . . .

I wrought my little havoc among them, and they had some strange secrets to yield. I never got a carp that went more than three pounds, but one day I stopped on my way to the carp pond to try a slip of water no bigger than a cottage garden that no one had ever thought to fish. My bread-paste pellet had scarcely sunk before I lifted a half-pound rudd, this time with a twenty-foot roach pole I had made myself, to get well out into the water where there was too much overgrowth to cast. For the next hour, I caught half-pound rudd as fast as I could bait. They were as hungry as mackerel. How many hundreds could there have been in that insignificant pond? I soon had my creel full to bursting, but I went on—a senseless slaughter which taught me all I ever needed to know about greed, and how hard it is to stop sometimes. I had no use for these fish. I only ate pike and perch, and then

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only following *Compleat Angler* recipes, after a great deal of work with salt, herbs, breadcrumbs and a needle scarcely distinguishable from the bones.

And yet I went on catching the famished wretches. I struck another pond, one dry summer, that gave the same results with tench: I took out so many that I could have sworn the water lost its brownish-green for the rest of the summer. It was a long time before I put everything back under twelve ounces and gave those I kept a tap on the head. I once caught an eel when live-baiting for perch, and once I had got over a slight shudder at the thought of taking him off the hook, went in for eeling with all the high seriousness of early youth. I made it a point of honour to cook them à la Bartas as quoted by Walton: delicious they were, half-fish, half-chicken and seven-eighths parsley. But what with burning the wood-ash needed before they could be skinned, and filleting them before they could be eaten, it was a messy business, and I don't know what the phantom fishermen would have thought of such a humble pursuit. It goes without saying that in all this I was aided and abetted by one of my grandparents, to be sorely opposed by the other.

These fishing jaunts of mine, uneventful enough in all conscience, might seem very tame affairs to a boy of today. The curious thing is that they form perhaps the most vivid memories of my life. I have explored, if it is not too grand a word, lakes in Abyssinia which, at any rate only a few years ago, were never shown on the map: lakes pink with flamingo, dark with bitter magnesian water in which nothing will live, lakes beside old lava fields like sheets of coal-dust after miles and miles and miles of coal. I have shot little circles of sanctuary in which to bathe unmolested by crocodile, I have spent Christmas day in a boiling spring, or as near boiling as comfortable. I have never fished these lakes with rod and line, but I have seen some of the twenty-pounders they will yield to dynamite. I have played ducks and drakes on them with pumice and though I never risked it myself, seen them sailed with papyrus boats. Exotic? Well, they are water, which I find it hard to keep away from. But they are not the ponds of my youth. They are like those giant horticultural confections all the colours of a blanc-mange: not real flowers. The real flowers are the sweet-williams and the thrift. The real water, the water that is water, real water, a fisherman's water, not Gertrude Stein's, is the ponds of the years that are lost.



*Anyone who must have fish can go to the fishmonger's shop and buy what he wants.*

MY WAY WITH SALMON, by Ian Wood

OLIVER KITE

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*Livening up the Dry Fly*



MAJOR OLIVER KITE, The Lancashire Regiment, served with the Indian Army 1942-47: campaigns, Arakan, North Burma (despatches twice). Royal West African Frontier Force 1951-53. Author, "Infantry Training" series since 1957. Chairman, Officers' Fishing Association. Chief flyfishing instructor, College of Further Education, Salisbury. Specialises in the *Ephemeroptera*; author of *Nymph Fishing in Practice*, and the chalkstream section of *The Complete Flyfisher*. Appears on Southern Television; keen on natural history, travel and languages. Married, lives in Wiltshire. Clubs: Flyfishers, International Fario (Paris).



## *Livening up the Dry Fly*

OLIVER KITE

NYMPH FISHING in the modern Netheravon style is based on the realistic handling of the artificial in the water to simulate the characteristic movements of natural nymphs. It is a most effective form of flyfishing and it is strange that dry-fly fishermen persist in striving for exact (*sic*) imitation in their fly dressing whilst largely ignoring the possibilities of more lifelike presentation of the dry fly.

There is nothing new in this latter concept: the trick of deliberately dragging an artificial Sedge-fly to simulate the scuttering of the natural insect on the surface has been bringing good trout to the landing net for many decades past, but on the whole little detailed study has been given to the surface movements and behaviour of the different species of natural insects and to the tactical application of drag and other enlivening movements in dry-fly fishing. I therefore hope this brief account of some of my own observations and findings may serve as an introduction to the interesting possibilities of such a study.

None of the Wessex chalkstreams on which I have a rod open for fishing until May, and the earliest I can fish in my own area is in April when the lake fisheries reopen. The only insect I see on the water in any numbers at that time, smuts excepted, is the *Sepia dun*, a very dark fly, indistinguishable at first glance from the familiar Turkey Brown which appears on the chalkstreams about Mayfly time.

## *Livening up the Dry Fly*

I dress an artificial Sepia Dun for use as a dry fly, and it looks most realistic on the water: hook, 1; silk, brown; hackle, brownish-black; body and thorax, undyed heron primary herls; tails, blackish; ribbing, gold wire. I like to use this pattern when Sepia duns are hatching and lake trout are rising to them, as they often do in mid-April. It is a logical artificial to employ in these circumstances but it must be handled in a realistic way to give the best results. Let me make my meaning quite clear.

Sepia duns are rather slow to take wing and become airborne, unlike the Slow-water Olives of May which seem to burst from the surface of lakes and rivers like Polaris missiles fired from underwater. It is characteristic of these Sepia duns to furrow the surface again and again as they repeatedly try to take off into the chilly April breeze.

Notice how this surface movement seems to bring up the trout to grab at them. You can make them come up to your artificial Sepia Dun as well, by imparting slight deliberate surface movement to it with your rod tip. But trout can also be lured to a variety of less convincing-looking patterns, provided these are handled in a similarly lifelike manner. It may be depressing to the artistic fly dresser but it is a fact, all the same, and it should encourage you to relate your fishing to rather than divorce it from the natural insects on which trout feed, above all to their behaviour in and on the water.

About the beginning of the last week of April comes the Black Gnat, followed a few days later by its larger and more succulent relative, the Hawthorn-fly. Trout relish them both. In districts where these insects are plentiful they are of great significance to the dry-fly fisherman. These land-bred flies are blown on to the water both singly and in pairs and, like ants in August, they continue to struggle rather helplessly on the surface for an appreciable time. Lake trout, especially big rainbows, can be attracted to suitable dry flies on these occasions by deliberately-imparted slight surface drag. Dress your artificials with two hackles for extra buoyancy and increased surface flare, and eschew wings, trailing legs and suchlike impediments to effective hooking.

Chalkstream trout are pretty naïve when they move to the big dun hatches in May. Fish taking Olives and Iron Blues present few difficulties to the dry-fly fisherman who keeps out of their sight, and baskets are taken on a remarkable variety of patterns. When the Mayfly itself comes up, fish can be quite easy to catch some days, but may get really difficult once they get over their initial suicidal frenzy and have been roughly pricked and harried into greater discretion. They then not only ignore artificials but often many of the naturals as well. How can we hope to succeed where the Creator seems to fail?

If a Mayfly moves as it passes over a fish, it is in most instances accepted as

## *Livening up the Dry Fly*

genuine and taken. If this is true of natural Mayflies, what can we do to invest our artificials with more lifelike qualities? The answer, I have found in practice, is to dress them with very long hackles, using the relatively big spade feathers at the lower end of the cape of an old Rhode Island cockerel. Cast the artificial delicately so that it alights gently and sits right up on the tips of the hackle, susceptible to every wanton air. As it rocks in response, the long hackle points finger the water surface in a most lifelike way.

Not all trout will be deceived: some get really fussy, perhaps careful is more accurate, after a sustained flogging by eager rods at Mayfly time. But you may well pick up a modest brace or two on days when other competent anglers fail to induce a single worthwhile fish to fasten, and in sophisticated chalkstream terms this is success.

Many summer duns are quick to leave the water, Pale Wateries, Slow-water Olives and both Spurrings among them, and when these insects are emerging during the daytime I nearly always do better with an almost bare o hook, appropriately handled as a nymph. There is, I suggest, little to be gained by attempting to simulate the surface movements of these quick-hatching species with the dry fly.

They say trout can be the devil to catch when they rise to the Blue-winged Olive dun. People are constantly promising to show me these uncatchable fish. They never do. In my experience trout feeding on Blue-winged Olives are not hard to deceive, anywhere. Why, then, is this fallacious belief so widely held?

During a hatch of Blue-winged Olives the important thing is to make quite sure that fish really are taking the winged duns, and not concentrating on the nymphs or taking something quite different on the water at the same time. From the beginning of August until the end of the year, later in a mild winter, this fly hatches mainly during the daytime when it should not be hard to see whether fish are taking dun or nymph. Earlier in the summer the Blue-winged Olive sometimes hatches mainly at dusk, more especially if the weather is warm. Duns of summer-hatching species do; this one just happens to be obvious, especially to those who for one reason or another fish mostly in the evening.

Trout taking Blue-winged Olives are popularly supposed to do so with a kidney-shaped rise form. This is a myth. When you see a trout rising on a summer evening, watch the tall smoky wings of Blue-winged Olives floating towards it. If these disappear beneath the surface when the fish rises, you know it is taking duns and should have little difficulty in deceiving it with suitably presented artificials.

It is unnecessary to animate the dry fly. The newly-emerged Blue-winged Olive sits quietly on the water for some moments before taking wing, easy

## *Livening up the Dry Fly*

prey for fish. Trout feeding on them will just as readily accept a Pheasant-tail Red Spinner, which I use most evenings as a matter of course. In the daytime, trout taking Blue-winged Olive duns rise equally well to my Imperial, originally dressed as an imitation of the male Large Olive dun. There is nothing parochial about this co-operation; I get it from the trout in all those countries where I encounter the Blue-winged Olive.

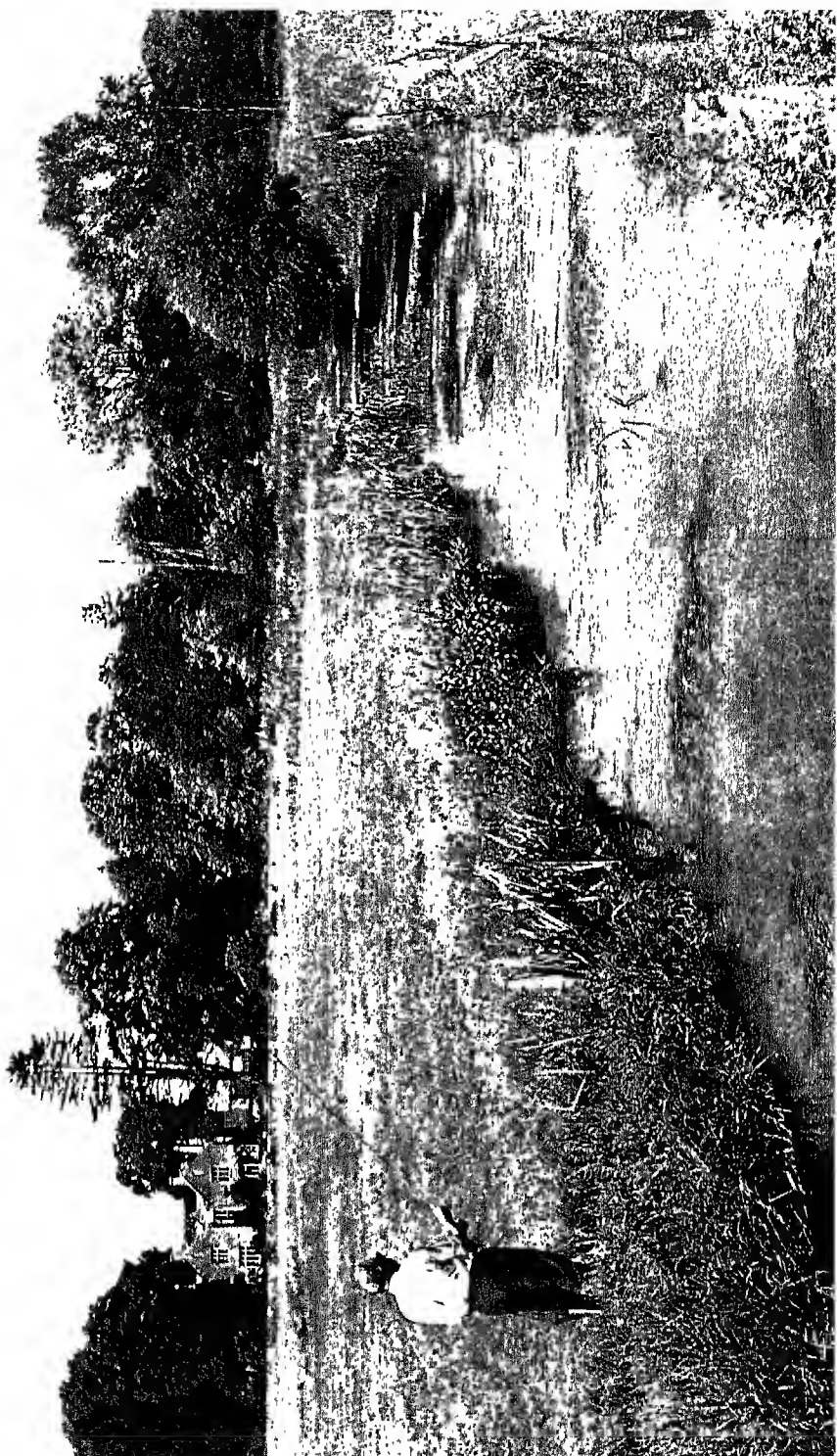
It is easy to determine whether trout are taking evening-hatching Blue-winged Olive duns on eastward-flowing streams like the Ebbble, Nadder, Wylfe and Kennet, because you can see the wings of the newly-emerged duns clearly silhouetted against the reflected afterglow. On south-flowing rivers, for example, Avon, Till, Test and Yorkshire's Foston Beck, it pays to fish from the east bank from which this same advantage is derived. This also holds good for the north-bound Normandy chalkstreams.

The awkward waters are those which flow mainly westwards, like the upper Itchen. On these you find yourself looking upstream into the gathering dusk with much less chance of detecting with certainty what the trout are feeding on. It is, perhaps, significant that among the writers who have tried to sell us this yarn (about trout on the Blue-winged Olive being difficult) have been some notable Itchen flyfishers.

The clue to Blue-winged Olive difficulties may occasionally be an undetected simultaneous hatch of little Pale Evening duns at dusk but more often, I think, the Blue-winged Olive nymph itself is the cause of the trouble. This nymph sometimes takes a long time to emerge as a winged dun. I have several times walked over half a mile from the wood we call Darkest Africa down to the millpool at Netheravon to accompany an Upper Avon Blue-winged Olive nymph trying to hatch as a dun. Trout take these nymphs because they are attracted by their twitching movements, which may be prolonged: Moseley once recorded emergence lasting no less than 20 minutes!

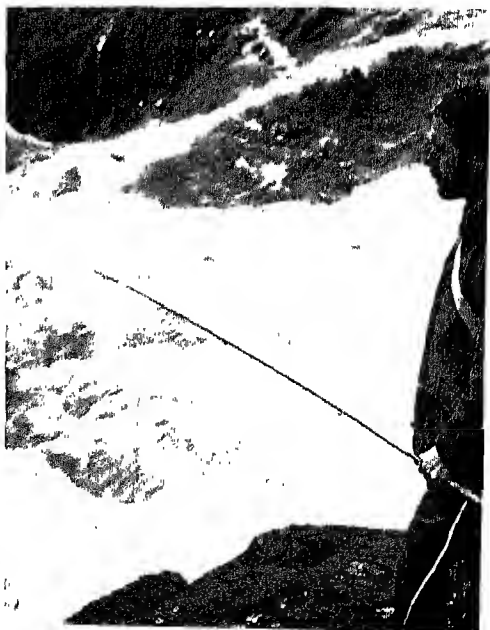
It is often easier in fly-fishing to explain a problem than to solve it, and the simulation of this kind of frustrated, twitching behaviour by the Blue-winged Olive nymph appears to be quite beyond the capacity of any flyfisher of my acquaintance. Here, I fancy, is the explanation why trout seem hard to deceive with the dry fly during a hatch of Blue-winged Olives; they are taking the nymphs rather than the winged duns.

When trout are attracted by the struggling movements of male spinners, blown on to the water by wind when in their lively prime, the judicious use of deliberate slight drag with the dry fly can pay good dividends in appropriate situations before and after the main dun hatch. A good place to try is just downstream of isolated trees or clumps of bushes which provide shelter for dancing male spinners. A fitful breeze can cause a certain amount





*Kite on concentration. Two all-expressive shots of Major Oliver Kite, one of our most eminent fly-fishers, working it out. Above, on Foston Beck in Yorkshire. Right, by a Lapland torrent*



## *Living up the Dry Fly*

of fall-out from these swarms and odd trout know just where to expect these windfalls.

Naturally, it is the female spinners that more often command the attention of feeding fish, being primarily taken as spent fly when they lie inert in or on the surface film. There is, however, an important exception, in certain circumstances: the Sherry spinner, the adult female of the Blue-winged Olive. These spinners are usually rather particular about where they lay their eggs, notwithstanding an inexplicable tendency to drop them over glistening wet roads on rainy summer evenings. The Blue-winged Olive winters in the egg stage. Moving, well-oxygenated water is best calculated to ensure the survival of the eggs during the long period, perhaps lasting from midsummer to March, before they begin to hatch into larvae.

Sherry spinners abound in the Upper Avon valley from late June to early October but at Netheravon they confine their egg-laying to two sites some distance apart. One is at the head of the rippling shallows immediately downstream of Haxton Bridge; the other is over the churning waters of Choulston hatchpool a mile farther downstream as the river flows. This latter site attracts more Sherry spinners than any other I know of anywhere in the Wessex chalk country, and evening after evening in July and August there may be a tremendous fall of Sherry spinners on this rather confined pool, in which many trout can be seen rising regularly and turning eagerly, right and left, as they feed on them. They are hardly ever caught in these circumstances!

The obvious explanation is drag. I think far too much is made of this very convenient excuse for failure on running water. I know chaps who would blame drag for lack of success on the Leeds and Liverpool canal. Drag is, or certainly should be, the servant of the dry-fly fisherman not his bugbear, as I have tried to show. The fact is that when the Choulston trout are nymphing, browsing on Olive spinners going down to lay, or taking duns, they are no harder to catch than hatchpool trout elsewhere in this notoriously difficult association water.

Their continued survival is not just a matter of faulty artificial patterns. This is rarely the case in chalkstream flyfishing, in my experience. The point, I think, is this. The fish all lie up in the narrow, abutment-flanked head of the pool, immediately beneath the few square yards of water surface on which most of the Sherry spinners fall. When they drop after releasing their egg clusters, these insects are far from being utterly spent, for of all our Upwinged-flies this species expends the least physical effort on the actual act of oviposition.

The spinners of Olives and Iron Blues laboriously crawl down to lay their eggs underwater, and those of Mayflies and numerous other species repeatedly



## *Livening up the Dry Fly*

dip on the surface until all their eggs, or prematurely-hatched larvulae in the case of Apricot spinners, have been extruded and shed. Sherry spinners, by contrast, simply fly upstream after mating, carrying their newly-laid eggs in a little round greenish mass, and when they reach a suitable site, like the one at Choulston, they turn and release their eggs as a bomber drops its load over a target.

I have looked after the two-mile Wylfe fishery at Bapton since 1957. Sherry spinners used to lay just downstream of the old hatches, which we had taken out in 1959. Nowadays the majority lay at the lower end of a deepish, narrow, fast-flowing length, far from bridges, where the swift stream begins to broaden into rather wider shallows and the water surface is slightly broken above the well-scoured gravel. I have stood there waist-deep in water many times on summer evenings, watching the Sherry spinners corkscrewing up from the reaches below, egg clusters held in place by the turned-under tips of their abdomens, tails stretched out in the slipstream behind them. When they have dropped their eggs and begin to fall on the water, the most obvious feature of their behaviour is the way they struggle and thrash about on the surface for the first few moments after reaching it.

This is very different from the popular conception of a spent spinner, lying motionless with wings outstretched in or on the surface film. There are, of course, plenty of spinners of other species which do look just like that, but not Sherrys during the first few moments after they fall. And I believe the Choulston trout notice them, and take them, because of this very activity, this movement which above all betrays their presence on the turbulent surface of the pool. Unless the spinners do move, it seems to me that these trout ignore them, just as they ignore our artificials for the same reason: there simply isn't time to animate them effectively in that particular situation.

Up at Haxton Bridge it is different. There the trout do not lie in the exposed water where the Sherry spinners actually fall, a few yards below the bridge. For reasons probably connected with security and the available cover, they wait for them in the streamy runs some way down the broad shallows. Mostly they lie close to either bank, or near the big water-celery clumps in midstream, and during a good fall of Sherry spinners are not hard to catch, by Upper Avon standards.

From Haxton Bridge itself the prelude to such a fall is an amber mist in the slanting rays of the setting sun, rolling upstream from the Court reach behind my cottage. The mist checks at the bridge where the spinners wheel, lay and start to fall. By the time they reach the trout, waiting to intercept them anything from forty to eighty yards downstream, they are thoroughly spent and lifeless, littering the water like so much spilt chaff, and no more lively on the surface. The trout take these inert spinners greedily as they drift

## *Livening up the Dry Fly*

down to them, and they accept the Pheasant-tail Red Spinner just as readily.

So I think I know why the Choulston trout are so difficult, at times, but where does this knowledge get me? I have yet to devise an effective method of simulating the struggling Sherry spinners with my dry fly in that particular location. Perhaps I never shall, but that won't stop me from trying.

It is true that on evenings when Sherry spinners are falling I can generally count on making a good basket at Haxton, sometimes much to the astonishment of competent performers who have laboured in vain a mile below me, but where is the challenge of that? Such an achievement is but hollow mastery, devoid of glory and piscatorial fulfilment.

To be candid, many of my most successful fishing days have proved equally rewarding for others. There is little to be learnt from such a day, amusing and enjoyable though the sport may have been. We should devote less thought and ink to experiences of this nature and a deal more to objective analysis of our failures, if we want to succeed next time we are confronted with problems of a like kind.

We can, of course, resort to dreary empiricism. As progressive flyfishers, ought we not to reject this alternative in favour of more lifelike presentation of our artificials? And whether we wish to enliven the nymph or the dry fly, is it not logical to base this on a study of the behaviour of the natural insects we are trying to simulate? I have heard it said that entomological knowledge is unnecessary to success in flyfishing. It depends what you mean by success!



*If you can catch roach consistently in clearish water, you can catch trout with the fly, equally consistently.*

TEACH YOURSELF FLY FISHING, by Maurice Wiggin

*Now my theory is that the very successful anglers are those who habitually send out their magnetic impulses on the right wavelength to be received by the fish, whereas the not-so-successful people are the ones whose sets are not tuned-in right.*

SALMON AND TROUT IN MOORLAND STREAMS, by Major Kenneth Dawson

*Various people have thought, from time to time, that great scope for trout-culture existed in this country. The truth is that everyone who has gone in for trout-farming in Britain, investing considerable sums of money in the process, has ended his career appreciably poorer than when he started.*

TROUT AND TROUT WATERS, by Lancelot Peart



HUGH FALKUS

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*The Sea Trout*

HUGH FALKUS is one of the most remarkable personalities in this book. A brilliant fighter-pilot during the war, once an actor and often a broadcaster, he now lives in almost complete seclusion, with his wife Kathleen, at Cragg Cottage near Ravenglass in Cumberland, where he receives anglers who fish his private stretch of the Esk for sea trout and salmon. Falkus has been a film maker and a regular television performer in the North, and now makes natural history programmes for BBC television. His book on *Sea Trout Fishing* is a classic of its kind. His film *Shark Island* made a sort of history,



## *The Sea Trout*

HUGH FALKUS

THE BIG FISH was lying above a rock at the head of the pool. Coming carelessly to the bank I caught a lucky glimpse of him and stopped just in time, sinking slowly on to my hands and knees among the broom.

At full length, I inched my way through long grass to the pool's edge and peered over. The fish was still there. A huge, grey shadow; so big that, at first sight, it seemed certain he must be a salmon. Then, through a clear "window" in the flickering current, I saw his tail—the unmistakable convex tail—and gasped in astonishment. He was unquestionably a sea-trout. An enormous sea-trout. The biggest sea-trout I had ever seen.

I lay motionless gazing at the fish, and the sun burned hot on my back. A high June day with a warm scent of damp hay; the land steaming after early rain. Since dawn, the spate had fallen quickly. Those foaming white streamers which earlier had ribboned the fellsides were gone, and now in mid-afternoon the river had lost its tinge of colour and was running clear again over the pale stones.

Down towards the pool tail between shallows and deeps was the newly arrived sea-trout shoal: a host of shadows, faint and grey and still. And with them had come the great fish which lay in front of me. On the night tide he had nosed his way into the estuary, tasting the thin water of his homecoming and running on upstream as a spate foamed over the shallows above the weir.

He lay, steady as a log, a few yards out from the bank in four or five feet

## *The Sea Trout*

of streamy water, broad tail gently waving; a round, white lamprey scar showing clearly on his flank just above the anal fin. Suddenly, he turned on his side and made a short dart upstream low against the bottom. The river flashed silver and I caught my breath at the sheer size of him. Three feet of silver and lilac beauty, humped with strength; his weight, well into the teens of pounds. He dropped slowly back again tail first into his original lie.

I gazed with wistful longing at that astonishing fish, every predatory instinct quivering with excitement and desire. The sea-trout of my dreams—and lying only a few yards from me. I might as well wish the moon as hope to catch him. And yet. . . .

The river was falling quickly. How long would he lie there? Half a day and a night, perhaps. By next daybreak he would have run, or dropped back to deeper water under the alder roots. I resisted a sudden temptation to hurry to the cottage for a rod. There was little hope of hooking him in that crystal sunlit water. My best chance, probably my only chance, would be that evening when the light had gone and dusk shadowed the pool. Wiser to leave him undisturbed till then.

Eight hours to sunset. I glanced at the sky. No sign of further rain. Good. If the weather held; if the fish kept to his lie; if I curbed an impatience to cast for him too soon, and waited until the magic moment of late dusk—*then*, if my fly were to flicker temptingly past his nose there was a chance, just a chance he might take.

Slowly, a picture of his lie burned into my mind: the depth of water, the set and strength of current, the exact place on the opposite bank from which to cast, the length of line needed to cover him.

I wriggled backwards out of the bushes and pushed myself up on clenched fists, knuckles laced with the jig-saw pattern of damp grass. Every sense tingled at the thought of catching that fish. I longed to hook him; to feel his strength. To fight it out in the darkness.

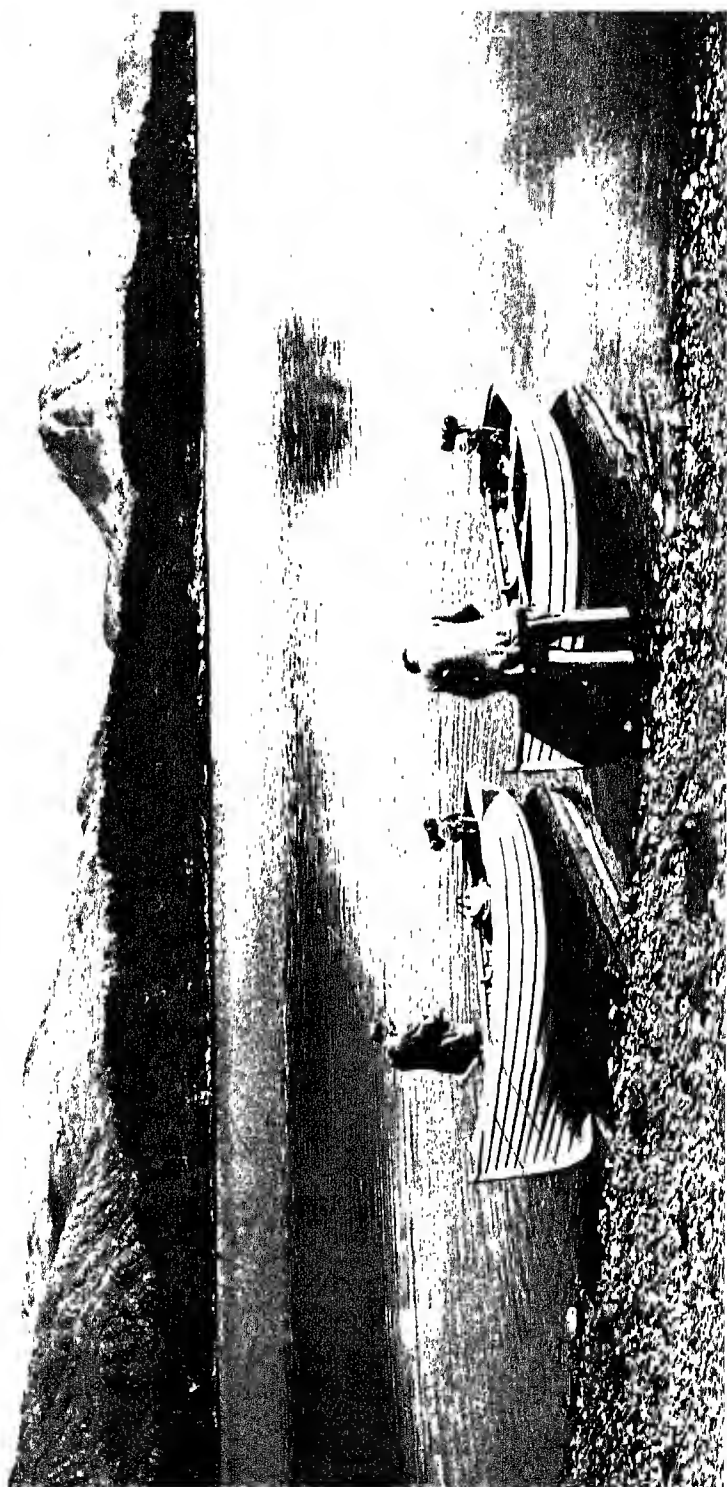
It was a windless dusk, the tree-tops a silent tracery of leaves against the evening star. I sat under a high sycamore in the lengthening shadows, watching the river, thinking of my big fish and wondering whether he was still in residence. It seemed probable that he was. My companions were fishing only the lower pools, and no one had disturbed him.

With the fading light, a chill came into the air. The sky was full of stars, and a wreath of ground mist hung low over the water meadows. I rubbed my line free of grease and left fifteen yards together with cast and fly to soak in a pool among the rocks.

Ten minutes to midnight. I had waited hopefully for a cloud to soften the







## *The Sea Trout*

starlit sky, but now a faint glow was beginning to spread above the eastern fells. Soon, bright moonlight would shine straight down the pool, and I realised I could afford to wait no longer. It was time to start.

I wound up the slack line, tested hook point and knots, and walked softly up the shingle to the pool neck.

The river was shadowy and mysterious. Arcturus, the night fisherman's star, flashed above the trees, its reflection shaking in the water at my feet. Wading carefully in, well above the big sea-trout's lie, I made a few practice casts to ensure that line and fly were sinking. Then, moving a yard or two downstream I cast again, feeling the slow drag of the line as it swung round, the slight tug of the water at my fly. Two more long paces brought me to the spot I had marked that afternoon. My next cast, or the one following, should cover the fish.

I paused, heart thumping, filled with a tingling anticipation. This was it. This was the moment. Now—have at him, and, God! let it be a good cast. The line sang in the air and went out into the bushy darkness under the opposite bank.

The fly seemed scarcely to touch the water. No sooner had it started to swing than I felt the line tighten with a slow, heavy pull. Then all hell broke loose.

Hardly had I realised he was hooked when the fish was on the surface, lashing in a boiling ring of foam. A moment later, the reel screamed as he went zooming off like a torpedo down the pool.

I stumbled desperately to the shore and began to run downstream along the shingle. A flurry of spray gleamed in the darkness at the pool tail, then the fish was over the lip and away down the glide beyond.

To follow him along the thickly wooded bank was impossible. I plunged on into the river beyond the shingle and splashed downstream in pursuit. Still the reel screamed. Would the fish never stop? Water surged in over my waders and clutched at my stomach. I had an unhappy feeling there was very little backing left on the reel.

Now the water was chest high and I was holding the rod at arm's length above my head. I put a finger on the reel drum. The backing was almost gone. I hung on as the rod bent and bent, and the line hummed taut.

And then, everything went slack.

I stood, numb with disappointment, water lapping my chest, the line hanging from the rod in a limp curve.

Sadly, filled with the bitterness of failure, I started to reel in.

Suddenly, the line tightened with a jerk that nearly pulled the rod from my hand. My heart leaped. There was a thumping great splosh somewhere

## *The Sea Trout*

far below me in the darkness, then again, the line went slack—as, for a second time, the fish turned and swam a few yards upstream.

Life flooded back.

So far, I had been hammered round the ring. Miraculously, I had survived that first determined rush. But now it was time I attacked, and stopped fooling about chest-deep in water with my fish a hundred yards downstream. Up by the shingle bank; that was where I wanted him. That was the place to fight it out.

“Come on, fish”, I croaked, mouth dry as dust. “You come along with me.”

I began to wade slowly back towards the shingle, my rod at right angles to the river, its butt hard against my side. And the fish came swimming steadily up, gaining on me, so that a belly of line formed behind him and urged him on.

I felt nothing. There was no sign of him. Not a splash, not a ripple. No tugging or pulling. But I knew he was somewhere out there in the darkness: a huge, grey shape, swimming steadily on, his earlier fear replaced by puzzlement at feeling resistance from behind, and now swimming upstream to escape from it.

At the top of the shingle I began cautiously to wind in the slack, watching the rapidly changing angle of line against the surface glimmer, careful not to tighten on him too suddenly.

The fish was almost level with me and, although I knew it was still anybody's fight, I sensed the first intimation of success. He had made his great effort, and failed. Now he was going to do what I wanted. I knew there was another rush coming, perhaps two, but no rush he made now would equal the first. He was mine—if the hook held.

At last the fish was where I wanted him—above me, in the neck of the pool. Now it was time to wake him up and start the second round.

I reeled in and tightened hard on him; tactics which met with instant reaction. Feeling sudden pressure from his flank, the fish tugged and bored, and tugged and turned and twisted and tugged again.

“That's right,” I said. “Go on, fish. Fight. Rush about. Do anything—except stay still.”

I kept the pressure on, giving him as much stick as I dared. After a minute or two of this he swung suddenly in a wide arc, slashed furiously on the surface, then came straight towards me leaving a huge “V” shaped ripple on the surface and almost running himself aground. Feeling the stones under his belly, he swirled round, shot away again into deep water and started his second rush. Prepared for it, I let him go; the stripped line running out through my fingers.

## *The Sea Trout*

He went whizzing down to the pool tail, and I followed him to the shingle's end. But this time he turned short of the glide beyond and plunged in the shallows.

"I've got you," I said. "You're nearly done now."

But the tail of a pool is no place for a tired fish.

I walked him steadily upstream again, this time keeping the pressure on, and he followed me like a lamb.

At the head of the pool he went deep, boring and twisting. I could feel him down there, shaking his head. I pulled him downstream a few yards and he swung in towards the bank, turning half on his side so that his flank flashed in the brightening moonlight.

Glancing over my shoulder I saw the moon's edge peeping above the fell. I stepped into the shadow of overhanging trees and stood quite still, the handle of the big salmon net between my knees, the net's rim lying on the bottom in slack water.

The fish was swimming very slowly now, wallowing in small circles. I lifted the rod and it arc'd against the stars as the fish came in towards me.

The moon rode above the fell and shadows slanted across the pool. Now every stone on the bottom was visible in the clear water and I could see the fish—a long bar of silver just below the surface only a rod's length from me.

I drew him gently in over the sunken net.

I raised the net. It came up six inches—and stuck solid. With a sensation of incredulity and despair I realised it was fastened to something on the bottom. I wrenched at it. It remained immovable, firmly held—as I discovered later—by a piece of barbed wire jammed between the stones.

Frightened by this commotion, the fish roused himself and rushed away across the pool.

For what seemed eternity he hung doggedly out in the current. I sensed the thrust of his tail against the cast as he stood on his nose boring down among the rocks, and my heart was in my throat.

Sweating, I managed at last to pump him up. He came into the shallows on his side, a swathe of silver in the moonlight.

As he touched the stones, the hook flew from his mouth into the bushes behind me.

For a terrible moment I stood paralysed, while the great fish splashed violently in a cloud of spray. Then, dropping the rod I plunged in and seized him by the tail. He writhed from my grasp and skidded away towards deeper water. Again, my fingers slipped on his slimy flanks. Now he was nearly able to swim. Almost demented, I fell on hands and knees beside him, got both arms underneath and heaved him up on to the shingle. He began to

## *The Sea Trout*

flop back towards the river, but I stumbled forward and flung myself on top of him.

A faint wind whispered in the leaves. The moon had climbed above me and the river was a flashing silver stream that sang in the shallows.

I emptied my waders and sat beneath the sycamore, the great fish gleaming from the grass at my feet. I looked at him in wonder. The biggest sea-trout I had ever caught, or was ever likely to catch. The fish of a life-time. He was even bigger than he had seemed when I first saw him. Without doubt he was the same fish: on his right flank just above the anal fin was that round, white lamprey scar.

I sat there for a long time looking at my fish, consumed with fierce elation, and yet—a curious regret. For years, season by season, this fish had survived the long dangerous journey from some distant tide rip to his lonely redds. A miracle of survival.

And now I had caught him.

For years I had fished, night after night the seasons through, dreaming of catching such a fish. And yet now I sat staring at his vast girth, feeling a strange emptiness.

Always, I had wished the moon, and travelled in hope. But now I had arrived . . . and the moon was at my feet.

I threaded a forked stick through his gills and carried him across dew-wet fields up the hill to the cottage. There, I put him on the kitchen table, lighted a lamp, changed my sodden clothes and sat looking out across the valley. Already, a pale oyster light of dawn was spreading above the fells.

Nailed boots sounded in the lane. The labrador jumped growling from his bed beside the stove, then stood wagging his tail in recognition. My fishing companions appeared in the open doorway, stopping with sudden exclamation as they glimpsed what was lying on the table.

They came gingerly inside.

"A sea-trout?"

"Yes."

"It *can't* be."

"It is. Look at his tail. Count the scales."

They gazed in awe.

"God in heaven! What an incredible fish . . . !"

Darkness lifted from the valley. We sat in the kitchen drinking coffee and whisky, while the sky caught fire and the birds sang. Below us, the river was a ribbon of mist. Fields beyond the river shone green and yellow in the early sunshine. Curlews were crying from the fells.

My companions debated whether to go to bed or try the sea pool for a

## The Sea Trout

whopper come in on the night tide. At length, inspired by whisky and the sight of my fish, they took up their bags and rods and went out again into the clear, cool morning.

Their footsteps faded.

For once, I had no desire to accompany them. I thought of my sea-trout in the dark sway of the sea, swimming his hours away under the stars—and stayed where I was, feeling no particular pleasure, just a vague regret, an intangible sense of defeat, with the great fish lying there on the table staring at me with his dead eyes and seeing nothing.



*The instinct to fish, to hunt, to lie quietly and observe the ways of nature, are dormant in most of us. They are apt to lie deeper with each succeeding generation as the lives of men are lived between higher and higher walls, and their excursions made in ever swifter transport. Then something awakes the instinct. Perhaps it is only curiosity, perhaps a desperate need for exercise. But one day it is suddenly insufficient to look down from the cabin of an aircraft at the unrolling hills, or through the unbreakable windows of a motor-car at the green fields on the other side of the hedge. You must stop, and go exploring as you did when you were a boy. Then lying on the bank of some stream, or looking up a valley in the gathering dusk, you see and hear the sounds of the unknown earth about you, and you are shocked at your ignorance of everything which sustains the life of the world.*

*From then on you may begin to hack a way out of the prison which you have built for yourself. Your friends may regard you as sick; you will not grow as rich as you believed you would, and the company of other men—some other men—will be less satisfying. Nearer at home, the metamorphosis of the man who discovers that there is a world around him is likely to lead to misunderstandings. To be kept late at the office is one thing, but to stay out half the night and return soaked to the skin, dirty and empty handed, is another. It may need more explaining than you have words at your command.*

FISHING AND FLYING, by Terence Horsley

*I know that if I go to the river when I have a headache or am really too tired to fish, or otherwise feel off-colour and not really keen to fish, it is very unlikely that I shall catch anything. My fly will be feeling as I feel, and won't be trying, and the fish will have a headache too and will be sulking. As I invariably feel depressed and off-colour when there is thunder about, this is not always mere coincidence: the result is a blank, thunder or no thunder.*

TORRIDGE FISHERY, by L. R. N. Gray



RICHARD GARNETT

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*Fifty Years A-Fishing*



RICHARD GARNETT was born in 1901, the eldest son of Robert Garnett, the author of *Some Bookhunting Adventures*, etc., and an authority on Alexandre Dumas, and of Martha Garnett, author of *The Infamous John Friend*, etc. Educated at Highgate School, married with two sons and a daughter; was admitted solicitor in 1923. Part-owned a ten-ton fishing yawl and took part in the Dunkirk evacuation. Was a Lieutenant R.N.V.R. during the last war. Travels, fishes and grows fruit.



## *Fifty Years A-Fishing*

RICHARD GARNETT

*"Anybody seen my tiddler, tiddle iddle  
iddle iddle iddler,  
There I stood with my cotton and a pin,  
Oh how I laughed when I pulled him in,"*

WE BOYS stood on our seats and shrieked like Beatle fans when the Funny Man sung this pop song at our first-ever pantomime about 1908, for tiddler fishing by the method advocated in the song was the passion of our lives. Owing to the occupational hazards of boots-full of mud and wet backsides fishing was forbidden for long periods, so that to the excitement of the sport was added the zest of concealment.

The next stage was hooks to gut, four-a-penny, with which fat wriggly gudgeon were successfully angled, then, a real mile-stone, a three-piece whole cane rod for ninepence, which enabled me to play and land a real whopper, a broad, silver, red-finned roach which may have weighed four or even five ounces. I had arrived as a fisherman, the days of ha'penny canes and jam-jars were behind me.

We were lucky enough to live within minutes walk of the Highgate Ponds in North London, which, with Hampstead and Ken Wood, gave us a choice of over a dozen ponds to fish. Although most outings were completely fishless, red-letter days came often enough to keep us keen. Six perch was an event, twenty roach (live-bait size) an epoch.

We were fond of eel-fishing and once, when our catch was a good one, I left a can of live eels under the dripping tap in the cloak-room at home. Next

## *Fifty Years A-Fishing*

morning I was awakened early by unusual noises, and stole downstairs to investigate. I was met by the cat, whose bottle-brush tail and staring round eyes told me that something was amiss. I soon discovered the cause of the cat's excitement, the eels had forced the lid of the tin and escaped to the tiled hall floor where they had been playing a lively game of tag with the cat, who was young and inexperienced in the ways of such tough and slippery customers. I retrieved an eel from every corner and, having wiped up the slime as best I could, returned to my warm bed. Needless to say, no mention of this episode was made at breakfast, but the fat was in the fire when Cook trod on a lively eel in the coal-cellar and nearly screamed the house down. She gave notice on the spot and my Mother was reduced to tears, as even in those days, good cooks were hard to find. Fishing was once more forbidden!

In later years we graduated to live baiting for pike, and all-night ledgering for carp and bream. My best carp, a big fish by our then standards, but in fact under 6 lbs., was taken one shiny September night during the first war.

The night had started badly from the fishing point of view, as zeppelins came over and the ack-ack fire made things a bit hot for us boys. We took cover under a willow tree, but felt rather naked as lumps of shrapnel thudded around us and hissed into the water. However the banging and flashes must have roused the fish, for, soon after the all-clear, I caught a good bream, and at 1 a.m. had a typical carp run, my old wooden Nottingham reel fairly flying round. I had been smashed on an earlier occasion by striking a running carp too hard, so this time tightened with circumspection, and, after a thrilling battle, safely netted the fish. This carp was much admired by the many anglers thronging the ponds next morning, and made my reputation. Thenceforth I was known as "Carpy" Garnett among the anglers.

My best pike (or "jack" as we always called them) was taken when we were not after jack at all, but perch fishing, using roach rods, fine silk line, No. 10 roach hooks and tiny roach, lip-hooked, as bait. We had chosen a bank where the wind was off-shore, stuck feathers in our floats and drifted the bait well out. It was a Saturday afternoon and crowds of footballers and their fans were passing the pond on their way home to tea. My feather disappeared, I struck, and was into something much bigger than a perch. For some time the fish made the running as I had little control with my light tackle, and a large crowd of spectators assembled and offered unsought advice. In the end, the verge being shallow, I managed to beach the fish, a pike of 9 lbs. hooked at the tip of his snout.

Towards the end of the first war the star angler at Highgate was "The Dodger" a stocky little one-armed man who, with his left hand, his teeth, and a steel hook on the stump of his right arm, was able to out-wit and out-manoeuvre the wily, and, to us ordinary mortals, uncatchable Highgate carp.

## *Fifty Years A-Fishing*

His method was floating bread-crust fished on a warm day when, despite the model yachts and swimming dogs, a shoal of carp would sun themselves in their favourite corner of the Dog Pond. The Dodger had lost his arm at Mons, and while in Flanders had picked up a choice phrase or two. To hear him cussing when a swan ate his crust or a dog seized his float instead of the stick thrown by his master, was an education for us boys.

Then there was "Dirty Dick" who caught huge numbers of small roach which he attracted to his swim by throwing a sack full of dung and gentles into the water (usually the swimming pond!) as ground-bait. They said he only bothered to comb the horse-dung out of his hair on Sundays. "Gentleman Dan" was the champion long-range roach fisher. Using flake, he would bait up a swim thirty yards out and reach it every time with his short rod and Nottingham centre-pin reel. The common herd used roach poles and tight lines; we had never heard of fixed spools. With his accurate casting and lightning strike, Dan usually had a crowd of admirers around him, whose legs he enjoyed pulling in cultured tones and absence of the Billingsgate employed by "Dodger" and "Red Nose the Railwayman", another skilled and persistent roach fisher.

My roach pole was a toy of only eighteen feet, used with a fixed line of Japanese fibre (or Jagut), the forerunner of nylon monofilament. One late June morning soon after dawn, while bream fishing, my walnut-size lump of flake was taken by a large carp. For a time I kept on terms with him with my pole and strong line, but presently Mr. Carp shot off on a course divergent to the bank, and the line broke. I should, of course, have let go of the rod and swum in after it when the carp was exhausted, but lacked the presence of mind to do so. Those ponds held monster carp. I well remember in the early days when the price of a new hook was hard to come by, pulling in my line and going home, rather than risk losing my precious hook in the mouth of one of the huge fish cruising in my swim.

In the winter, when we needed live-bait, the best chance was in the water warmed by the power station on the canal at Camden Town. Small boys were strictly forbidden, but by means of an old clothes-line, we would let ourselves down a twelve foot wall on to the tow path at a spot fairly free from observation and, if our luck was in, catch a dozen roach and gudgeon. No little agility was needed to get back up that wall with the bait-can full of water and fish! Next morning we would be up before dawn and pedalling our push-bikes through North London, mostly over granite sets and tram-lines, with the bait-can strapped to the carrier. We lost water at every bump and had to stop at the horse-troughs to top up and keep the precious baits lively. Our destination would be Mossop's Hole or some other disused gravel pit on the banks of the Lea. Sometimes the pits would be frozen over so that

## *Fifty Years A-Fishing*

we had to fish the river, but were never successful there. We seldom fished the Thames as we were not versed in the techniques of river fishing, but, on our few visits, were amazed by the large baskets of fine roach made by Belgian refugees, using hemp-seed, a bait we had not heard of until then.

In the days of which I write, middle-class suburbia considered coarse-fishermen to be distinctly non-U. At railway stations an angler carrying rods was looked at askance by fellow travellers, and even my school-fellows considered me an outsider and a daft one at that, because I cut football and sneaked off to the ponds. The respectable matrons of Highgate West Hill, shepherding their young to church on a Sunday morning, were scandalised when they met me stealing home from an all-night session with the carp, bleary eyed, muddy and disreputable.

In my early twenties a much loved uncle returned to England and we planned a camping holiday in Ireland which was so successful that we repeated it every June for the next ten years. Into the side-car of my old motor-bike combination and on to its luggage grid we crammed a tent, sleeping bags, billy-cans, grub box and a Ford collapsible canvas boat, with uncle perched on top of the load. In Ireland we found a charmed land. Few but the tinkers camped in those days, and the country people gathered from afar to gaze in wonder at the strange Englishmen living in the little white tent on the hillside.

Uncle, a born humorist, but handicapped by a most painful stutter, captured the hearts of the people in a trice, and we were pressed to visit every hearth in the district. Having known Fred Barker, author of *An Angler's Paradise*, we made for the scene of his triumphs, Lough Inchiquin in the County Clare, where we camped on the thickly wooded west side, near the Crag. That night it started to rain cats and dogs and it kept on without a break for three solid days and nights. For the whole of that time we lay in our tiny tent, sleeping, playing cards and eating out of tins. On the fourth day the rain stopped and the lake level stopped rising—just short of the tent-flap.

At last the longed for moment had come—I was about to wet a fly in the fabulous Inchiquin! I had never fished with a fly before, but had some idea of what to do from Barker's book, and having assembled the Ford boat, set forth on the lake to make my debut as a fly fisherman. Well, in less than ten minutes there were excited shouts from me and Uncle was standing on the shore enjoying the battle with a splendid trout. Inchiquin trout are bars of silver with tiny black crosses, like fresh run sea-trout, and this beauty of 2½ lbs. enthralled us when I returned to the shore in triumph, and was marvellous eating, split and grilled, after our three days' enforced can-opening.





## *Fifty Years A-Fishing*

From that day on I became a dedicated fly fisherman, but had little opportunity to practise except when on holiday in Ireland or Scotland.

The following June, Uncle and I were camped on a little spate river running into Bantry Bay where fishing for the few salmon was free. A relative had recently bequeathed me his fishing gear (probably unused since his youth) and I was equipped with an ancient greenheart trout rod, an adequate reel and line, a doubtful cast, and salmon-flies with the old-fashioned gut loops in place of eyes. A nice little flood came down one day, and daybreak next morning found me on the best of the salmon pools ahead of all the locals.

Soon after the morning mist rose off that lovely pool a salmon showed at the edge of the fast water under the bank. With feverish excitement I cast the Claret-and-Mallard above the fish so that it would cross the current over him, and, to my amazement, it was taken at once. The fish was sluggish, and circled the pool at a steady pace, allowing my nerves to calm down a bit, so that I had time to wonder how to land the fish without gaff or net. I was maintaining a nice steady pressure with the little rod, but during his fourth circuit of the pool the salmon put on speed and made for some bushes trailing in the water. The end was sickening, I can still feel the surge of despair that went through me when, having put on more pressure to turn the fish, the ancient cast parted and I reeled in the slack line!

The first half of my angling career was spent learning the hard way, often without adequate tackle, advice or transport. The second half has been much easier owing to the generosity of excellent friends and the wherewithal to pay for suitable tackle and transport, and a modest sum for the privilege of fishing private water.

There came a time when I decided that I must try and get some fly fishing in England, and as trout fishing in good water was beyond my means, I determined to find some grayling fishing within reach of my home in Surrey. Starting at the head-waters of the Itchen, I travelled down stream from village to village, asking at each the address of the local water-keeper, and when I caught up with him, enquiring as to the possibility of renting some autumn grayling fishing. I met some pleasant men and some surly ones, but all were equally discouraging until I arrived within five miles of the tideway. Here I was directed to the home of a riparian owner whose water was said to contain a large head of good grayling. On contacting this owner he was generous enough to give me permission to fish for grayling for the remainder of that season and, as a result of that contact, I am now privileged to fish excellent salmon water on the Itchen where the rule is fly only, after June 1st.

The beauty of a chalk stream lies not only in the lush water meadows through which it flows, but in the bed of the river itself—crystal clear water sparkling over clean gravel runs, with beds of vivid water weeds. The great



## *Fifty Years A-Fishing*

advantage of the chalk stream from the salmon fisher's view, is that the water is so seldom out of order. Heavy floods run off in a matter of hours, and, if the winter rains have been normal, the springs keep the level up, notwithstanding summer droughts which render so many rivers unfishable.

In the clear water of the Itchen we are forced to use fine tackle and this means the inevitable loss of some fish in the weeds. It minimises losses to use a fairly long rod, keep the rod at arms length above your head, and run hell-for-leather after every fish hooked. If you let a lively fish get any distance from you, he will be around a weed-mass and back down the other side, and you will be lucky indeed if you land him. Sometimes, when this has happened to a tired fish, I have saved the situation by jumping into the river and gaffing him as he dangles on a short line down stream of the weed mass. And it is quite a job getting back up the bank with the rod and a lively fish on the gaff!

The curse of the chalk stream is the floating cut weed, coming down from the trout waters of the higher reaches, where cutting is essential if there is to be any water clear enough to put a fly on. The River Board publishes a series of dates when cutting is permitted or banned, but, regrettably, riparian owners, or their employees, often break the rules. In years gone-by salmon fishing often became impossible owing to the great rafts of cut weed coming down, but in 1963 the River Board rigged a weed-stopping boom which was successful in trapping the largest masses, and although fishing often became tiresome due to floating fragments, it was never necessary to give up, as in previous years.

The reach of the Itchen that I am privileged to fish yields about sixty salmon and grilse in a good season. We usually get a few springers of from 15 to 20 lbs. (our best was 39½ lbs.) but the main run is of summer fish, averaging 10 lbs., which starts towards the end of April and peters out late in June. However, in July the grilse start to come in, never a big run, but a steady trickle of fresh fish right up till the end of the season, and they give excellent sport, often putting up a livelier fight than the salmon. If we get a flood in late September a few big autumn fish come in, and some of my best sport has been with heavy autumn cock fish.

For many years now, all my fly-fishing for salmon and sea-trout fishing has been done with tube-flies. In the early years I experimented with many varieties of hair, but have now come to the conclusion that badger is the most successful. Of course I ring the changes with light and dark hair and different coloured bodies to suit conditions of light and water, but my basic fly, and the most successful, has grey badger hair (tied on the top like the wing of a standard fly) and a silver body close wound with blue or green monofil nylon, like an Ivens Green Nymph. I am much indebted to Mr.

## *Fifty Years A-Fishing*

Ivens for the idea, but consider that the silver shining through is a great improvement.

Another river I have fished a good deal in recent years is the Towy where a kind friend owns a mile of lovely water. It is as different from the Itchen as can be, but is equally loved. Salmon are patchy except late in the autumn, but the sea-trout, or sewin, run large—the 200 odd sewin taken in 1963 averaged 3 lbs. 2 oz. each. We find that tube flies are the most successful lure for sewin too, light ones for warm nights, and larger more heavily leaded ones for deep slow fishing when a chill night wind cools the surface. Except in time of spate, our sewin fishing is done at night. Sometimes by dawn our bag is heavy and our contentment deep, but by no means always. If the river is low and clear when the night's catch has been disappointing, I will tell you how the bag may be increased, if your abhorrence of the humble worm is not too great.

When the light grows strong enough to see the colour of the grass, take off your fly-reel and put up a fixed spool with 5 lb. monofil; to the business end attach a one inch low-water salmon-fly hook; nip on just sufficient swan shot to enable you to cast, and you are all ready, bar the worm. The worm is the snag—beastly slimy wriggly creatures, and they must be nice and lively to be taken by the sewin. Hold a lob between the thumb and forefinger of the left hand just below the head and insert the hook-point into its mouth, then thread it up the hook until the point can be brought out just below its middle.

Mounted in this way a lob has a most natural appearance in the water, and nearly every fish takes it tail-first and ends up in the bag. Choose a nice deep gravelly run where you know that sewin lie in daylight; cast across stream to the far side of the run (the angle will depend on the strength of current) and as soon as the worm touches bottom, tighten on it and never lose touch. Then finger in the line, with little twitches inch by inch over the gravel, so that the worm works down and across the current. If the sewin are in the mood, and they usually are before the sun is above the horizon, and sometimes even as late as 7 a.m., you will soon feel a twitch.

It is essential at this point to have some slack monofil in hand, for at the next twitch the fish will move off a few feet back to his lie and you must not let him feel any drag as he goes. At the third twitch you may tighten, and you will be very unlucky if you do not hook him firmly. Immediately on hooking a sewin, walk him upstream and he usually follows like a lamb on a string. Play him out well away from his brothers, and you may well get a second fish only minutes later. An unsporting method of taking sewin? I ask you to try it before passing judgment, as it is not quite as easy as it sounds.



JACK HARGREAVES

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*Fishing for Television*

JACK HARGREAVES, 52, is the son of a Yorkshire farming family. Went to London University to qualify as a vet., but had to leave and get a job owing to the Depression. Went to Unilever to write publicity for cattle foods. Graduated into journalism. Edited *Lilliput*. After the Hulton dissolution, joined the National Farmers' Union as a senior official and from there got "by accident" (he says) into television, where he has become extremely well known, especially in the south of England. A general fisherman—anything from roach to salmon; and sea fish thrown in. Has fished in many countries and claims that as a member of the R.T.R. in 21 Army Group he caught a barbel in the Weser the day he entered Hamelin.



## *Fishing for Television*

JACK HARGREAVES

THERE ARE said to be two and a half million fishermen in Britain—so any one of us is just one of them. Very few break records, and then usually by accident. I can make only one claim for what may be a record. I believe I was the first man to do more than a hundred television programmes about fishing. And that series started with a lunch about something else altogether.

During four years and more of fishing with a camera at my elbow I learned several things, and the first of them was the difference between a good local angler and a really expert general fisherman. For the first season I did my fishing safely on the stretch of the River Kennet which I had known for twelve years. On that river I really could catch fish. I thought I was good. "You want me to catch a perch? Certainly." "A summer chub? Yes, I have five of them looked out all ready." When the time came to film grayling I knew that there was just one short stretch of thirty yards where we should concentrate our efforts.

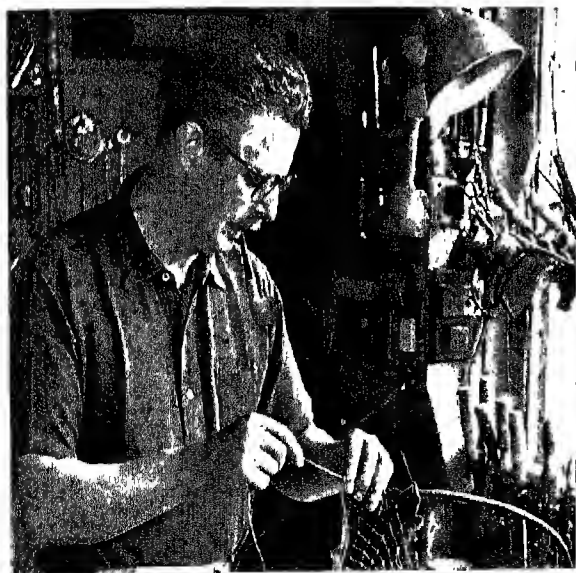
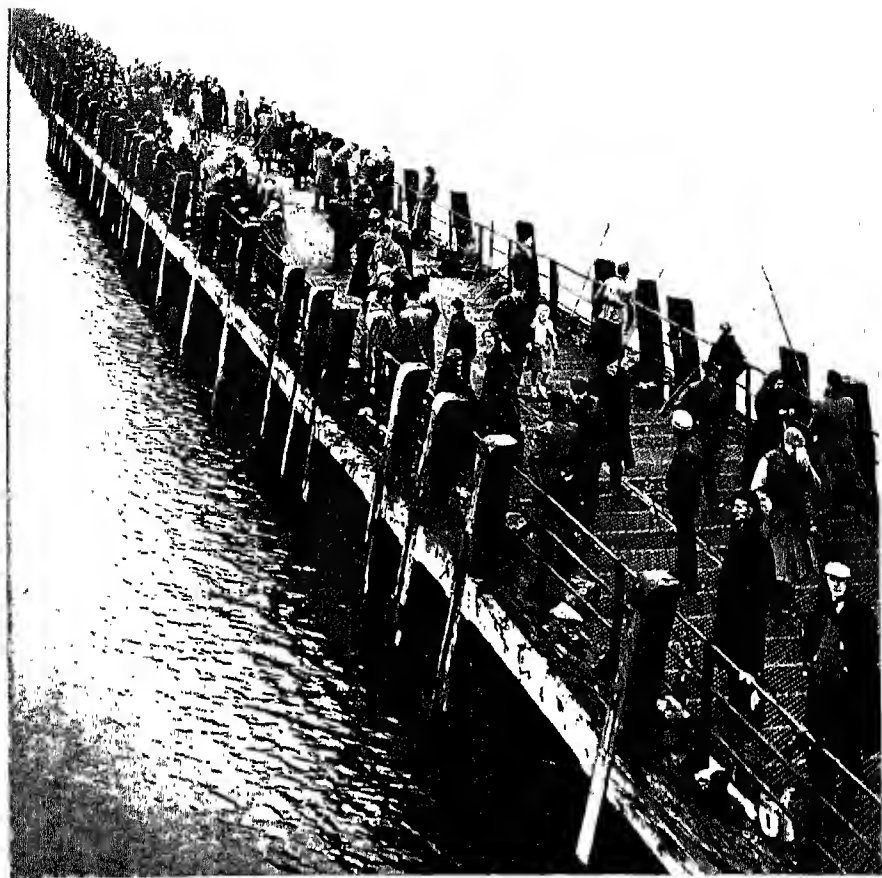
Then, as a result of the programmes, I found I had gone into partnership with innumerable fishermen all over the South of England and it became impossible for me to stay at home any longer. They wanted to watch the fishing of their own district on the screen and they wanted to see for themselves if the whole thing was above board. And so, weekend after weekend, I found myself, just for a day at a time, on waters that I'd never fished before, having to think out the fishing problems from scratch without the benefit of hindsight. It was only then that I realised how well I had known the Kennet water. Not only was every swim and corner of it familiar from fishing experiences spreading over more than ten years, but every year in the early

## *Fishing for Television*

summer, just before the general fishing season began, I had made it a practice to take the boat up to the top of the water in the Land Rover and then drift downstream, without a rod, examining every inch of the river to see what the winter floods had done to the channels and the swims and the banks, where the weed had shifted and where a fallen branch had altered the current. I felt like a blind man on the new waters, and I developed a great admiration for the match fisherman who can go to strange places and still come home with a prize.

I discovered that there were fishermen whose understanding is so deep that they hardly seem to suffer this disadvantage when they go somewhere new. Richard Walker, for instance. He fished with me once by invitation during my first season of television, at a time when his interest had settled for the time being on the barbel. That fish had never been in evidence in our stretch of the river, though for years they had haunted the mill-pool above our limits and the fast water below. During that winter the River Board had shifted a big bank of gravel halfway down our fishing and in consequence altered the geography of the river very greatly. The keeper told me that he was sure that the barbel had appeared on our stretch, though he had only had glimpses and hints of their presence; so, knowing Dick Walker's current interest in the fish, I rang him up and asked him if he would like to come and have a try. Typically, he left his fishing-tackle packed up while he walked for forty minutes up and down the river, examining it and thinking about it. Finally he said, "If there are barbel in this stretch they'll be *here*", pointing to a piece where they certainly had never been in the years before. It was then that he put up his rod and sat down among the sedges. Fifteen minutes later he landed a 5 lb. barbel on a water he had never fished and, indeed, had never seen before.

Travelling from water to water, I soon had confirmation of the remarkable way in which the same fish in different rivers will develop different tastes as far as bait is concerned. On the Kennet, all my big roach—and there were some very big roach—were caught on maggots. Bread brought only chub. Soon after we started to move around, I invited Owen Wentworth, the Dorset postman who is known as a star roach fisherman on the Stour, to try to catch a roach of over 2 lb. for the camera. He did it. In fact, one of the roach he caught was 2 lb. 6 ozs., and every one of them was hooked on bread flake. Privately, I thought that maggot would have done just as well at that season and in those conditions, and that I myself would have fished with them. But on a later occasion we shared a boat and trotted our floats side by side down a single swim. I started with my maggots, stuck to them for an hour and a half, and caught nothing at all. He had his usual success with the bread flake. Then by arrangement we swapped baits. Nothing

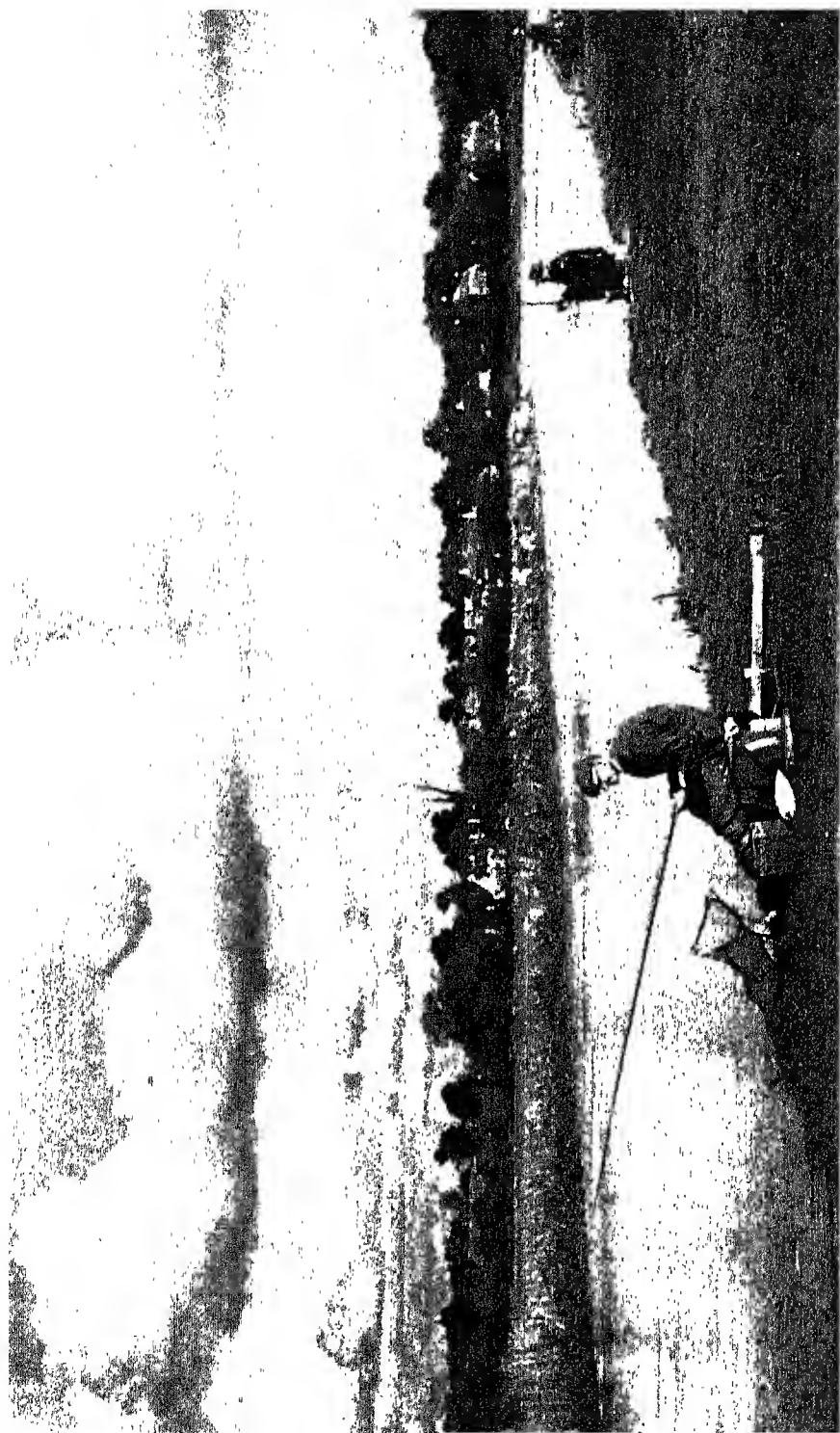


*His public*

JACK HARGREAVES

*His privacy*





## *Fishing For Television*

came to the maggots, even with Owen Wentworth fishing them, and I scarcely had an empty swim down with the flake.

Similarly, when we went to catch bass in Poole Harbour, we caught them with a spinning rod and a plug bait. At Lymington, we caught them on a ledgered ragworm. Off Selsey Bill, by drift-lining a live sand-eel. And off Beachy Head, with the tail of a hermit crab. As for that almost uncatchable fish, the grey mullet, he provided the biggest bait mystery of all. All along the South Coast he seems to be caught only by luck and never by intent. In my own home estuary, the boys in desperation lie face down on the railway bridge and snag him with weighted triangles as he moves upstream. I thought I had the problem solved when the locals of Christchurch showed me how to catch him, as he moved with the tide up the Avon estuary, by spinning a little spoon with one inch of ragworm attached to the hook—one inch, no more. One morning, I shared this method with resounding success and I thought that at last I knew how to catch mullet. As a result of the broadcast, the trick was tried all along the South Coast, and the letters poured in—to say that it didn't work.

Fishing for television taught me that sea angling can be as fascinating and refined a sport as fishing in rivers. I had known most of the ways of fresh water fishing since infancy, but I always imagined that the sea was the real home of "chuck and chance it", that it was just a matter of taking a nap and waiting for the little bell on the tip of the rod to jingle. When, in the second season, I was forced somewhat reluctantly into sea fishing, the early events seemed to confirm my doubts. I went to a competition in which some three hundred anglers proposed to sit along several miles of shingle, prop their rods against rests and take to their deckchairs. While they were drawing their numbers for places, I asked one of them to show me his tackle and then to describe his method. There didn't seem to be much method in it, so I asked him where the skill lay. "Don't tell me there's any skill in it," he replied.

We trudged the miles of shingle and wondered whether it was fair to photograph the sleeping anglers, until we found a man without a chair. His rod was always in his hand; his tackle was constantly working. His box of ragworm was shaded from the heat of the sun with an adapted lady's umbrella. When we asked him what he was doing, he was able to tell us what and why. This was the first evidence I had that the modes of thought that I had learnt in fresh-water angling could be applied to the sea, and I said to the footsore, grateful cameraman, "We'll stay with him. He's going to win." And he did. By more than 30 lbs. That was Eric Beebe, from whom I learnt more every time we met. His death later was the loss of an admired friend.

## *Fishing for Television*

So I discovered that sea anglers, like the rest, are divided into two sorts—the thinkers and the others. Since then, I have concentrated on the thinkers and followed their thoughts about the nature of the bottom, the reaction of the fish to the seasons, the complexity of the feeding habits and the influence of the tides. And sea fishing has opened up yet another branch of the sport where I shall be able to learn for longer than I have time for.

I learnt also from this medium of contact with the majority that it is an essential part of the make-up of a fisherman to believe that he does it right and everyone else does it wrong—even in the face of the evidence. I knew enough from the beginning never to fall into the trap of saying, "You should do this" or "You should do that" but only "We did this and this is what happened". However, this is no protection. I soon got used to opening the mail every week and discovering what I had been doing wrong the last time out. The fact that, last time out, we managed to catch some good fish made no difference. We would still have caught more, and quicker, if only we had done it the right way.

When I wanted to make my first film of bass fishing, I asked my sea-fishing friends who was the best bass fisherman in the district. Almost unanimously they answered, "Dick Tremlett". And there is not much doubt that this was the right advice, because Tremlett, who is a chemist from Langstone, has spent thirty years studying the bass. He has made coloured films of all the bass's food animals. He has a boat specially built for bass fishing. Yet, like all real experts, he is modest in his claims of what he knows. On the way out from Langstone to Selsey Bill he told me about the bass, but his sentences tended to begin with "I'm not sure" or "I suspect" or "I think it's possible that. . . ." He'd had us up at five in the morning to catch live sand-eels for bait and his technique for doing that was his own and dramatically successful. We set off for the Bill towing four big courges full of live sand-eels, and even these "courges" or "pens" were of his own design and were towed behind the boat in a special way to prevent the turbulent water of the wake from beating up the sand-eels. We tried one mark and, because we hadn't a fish within five minutes, Tremlett decided to move. We settled again in the rough water of a tidal overfall and began to fish, ground baiting with handfuls of the live eels, altering the weight on our drift lines to raise them higher or lower as an occasional pollack or a garfish told us we were at the wrong level. We caught sixty-six good bass in an hour.

As we walked up the quay at Langstone, carrying the baskets of fish, I said to the producer, "When this goes on the air, somebody is going to write and tell us we were doing it the wrong way!" And they did.

Finally, I was forced, against the grain, to learn that there certainly are such things as cycles of luck. Sometimes for weeks on end everything suc-

## *Fishing For Television*

ceeded. After a wonderful Mayfly day, when the air was full of the dancing insects and everything went right, we set off to dap for a chub in the Walton manner at the very opening of his season and landed a monster. Then to the Solent to try and catch a tope. I just hoped for a tope, even a 15 lb. tope, while the camera was watching, but I caught a 53-pounder which was for some time the local record. Of course it was wrong for a *parvenu* sea angler to hold such a distinction, and the matter was soon put right by a local man of long tope experience who caught one weighing 54 lbs.

At other times things went so wrong for so long as almost to result in melancholia. Although I have caught pike all my life, and never with much difficulty, there was a long cycle of failures. We went six times and fished hard, by every possible means, without so much as seeing a pike. At last a small boy offered me a two-pounder he'd just caught, as consolation. And the matter of the great tope was set right by the fact that in the first three seasons we never did catch a conger eel.

Fishing for television changed all our lives; mine in the respects mentioned above. George Egan, the producer, had never fished except for little trout in the brooks of his native Scotland, but now he can sit for hours over a carp ledger. Stanley Brehaut, the remarkable cameraman, knew nothing of the sport when we started, but now he owns his own boat and is by way of being a flounder expert.

Best of all, we watched one young life set on a new course. We undertook to teach a boy of six to catch his first fish and on the Hampshire Avon he took two perch, each over a pound. As he marched back homewards, with the fish hanging from a stick like Huckleberry Finn, I thought of all the fishing I had done in nearly half-a-century and wished myself back with him.



*F. was a humorist in his way. In his fishing bag was a beautiful rubber salmon which could be inflated at will by blowing into a mouthpiece. So he seldom quitted the river without carrying a fish, and his reputation grew. . . . But he did have the delicacy to demonstrate in the local café before leaving the town.*

ANGLING CONCLUSIONS, by W. F. R. Reynolds

*Under the heading of bona-fide poaching comes the putting down of drainpipes at certain distances in a small stream, with the special object of catching the trout which make these their habitat, by means of a hand net and a stick to rattle at the bottom end.*

FISHING FANTASY, by J. Hughes-Parry



KENNETH MANSFIELD

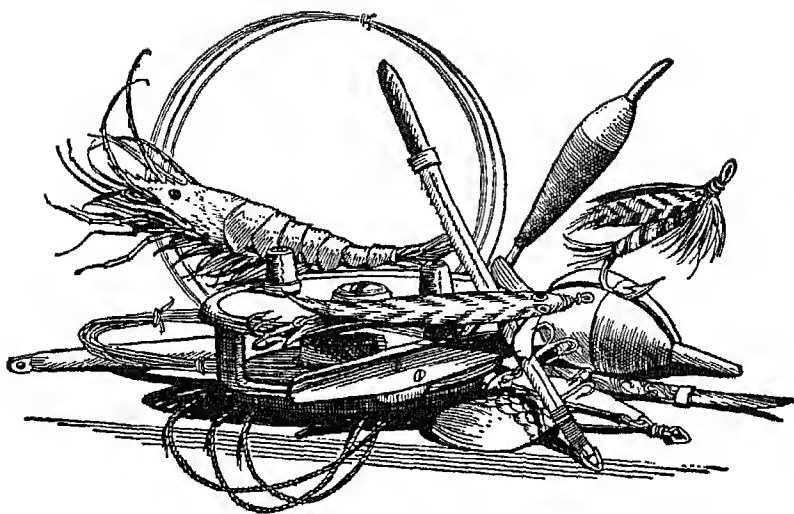
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*Three Fishes*

KENNETH MANSFIELD is an ex-soldier who has travelled widely and now lives in Hampshire, where he writes about fishing and edits scholarly publications.



## *Three Fishes*

KENNETH MANSFIELD

IF YOU WERE suddenly asked to say which fish, of all the fish you have caught, had given you the greatest amount of pleasure or satisfaction, how long would you take to think out the answer? One second? Five seconds? Not much longer, I imagine, for all of us have caught fish that spring instantly to mind when the subject is discussed.

The fish of your choice will not necessarily be the heaviest you have caught—more often than not it is unlikely to be so. Too much depends on circumstances, mood and a score of other factors that build up a memorable day which the capture of a certain fish makes perfect.

In rare cases the fish may not even have been caught and your mind may dwell on a great battle lost.

Three fishes have made a profound impression on me. Here they are.

By the early summer of 1943 I was getting tired of the humid heat of Arakan and the continual moves up and down the Naf Peninsula as the front ebbed and flowed with the tide of war.

Then came my turn for leave—nineteen whole days of it—and I put into operation plans I had brooded over for many months. I had heard much about the trout fishing of the Nilgiri Hills, in Southern India, and I determined, no matter how much time I spent in travelling, to get there and enjoy



### *Three Fishes*

myself with a rod instead of spending a "bright lights" leave in overcrowded Calcutta.

A slow drive up the brick road brought me to the Transit Camp near Chittagong, where my leave started. Two days of train and river steamer and I was in Calcutta where I struck a nasty snag. The R.T.O. had no accommodation on the Madras Mail for five days—days which I could not afford to waste. After a good deal of enquiry and taxi hiring I discovered the "Puri Passenger", which left a suburban station nightly and took two days to reach Madras, against the twelve hours of the Madras Mail. I took it. Apparently I was the first European to travel on it for months, and I got V.I.P. treatment and a thorough rest.

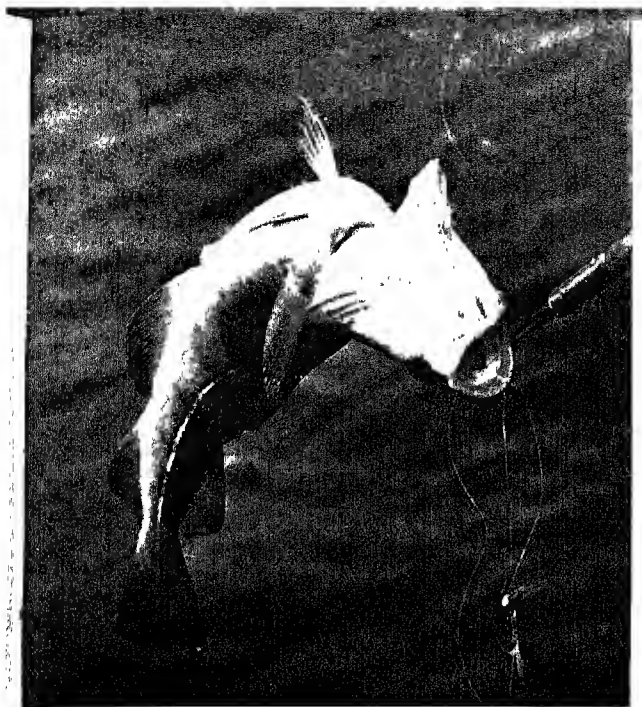
I had lost all my tackle in Burma, and during my few hours in Calcutta I visited Mantons, famous for guns and rods in India almost since the days of the Company. There I bought the only fly rod they had—a 7 ft., 4 oz., wand, lighter than I wished for at the time but one which proved more than sufficient for my needs. I have it now, straight as the day it was made and still brought into use whenever I fish on brooks or small streams. Another stroke of luck was a light Kingfisher double-tapered line and a reasonably new stock of gut casts. I also bought a reel of sorts, and, on Manton's recommendation, a landing-net from a man who made them in a shop down a side-street. I had flies in plenty—both bought and self-tied.

I wasted no time in Madras. After a scant hour's wait I was on a broad gauge train which took me to Mettupalaiyam, where I and scores of other Nilgiri-bound leave-takers packed into the open sided coaches of the cog railway which racked its way noisily up through Mowgli-type jungle from something near sea level to the 7,000 ft. plateau on which stood our destination, Ootacamund.

In times of peace Ooty was the sportsman's and the golfer's hill station, though hundreds of people with little interest in sport or games came up to breathe the cool air and relax in an English setting where log fires in the evenings were both a pleasure and a necessity. Game, from tiger and buffalo to dozens of lesser species, was there or thereabouts in abundance.

The English setting is no trick of words. As a soldier I was more than familiar with Salisbury Plain. The Nilgiri plateau resembled the Plain—rolling, undulating grassland, pointed by hillocks and sparsely treed. I'm not a geologist and the formation may or may not have been chalk or limestone, but the numerous streams held trout that developed characteristics similar to those of their English progenitors in chalk and limestone waters.

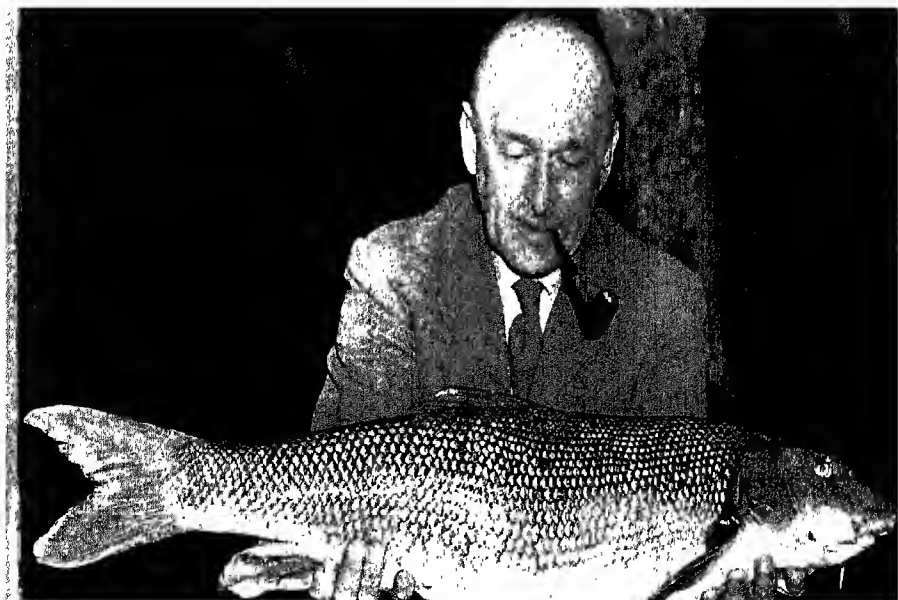
While at Ooty I spent two long evenings with an archivist who knew the exact date of every introduction of trout to the Nilgiris since the first release in the nineteenth century. This is no place for detail, but the result of those

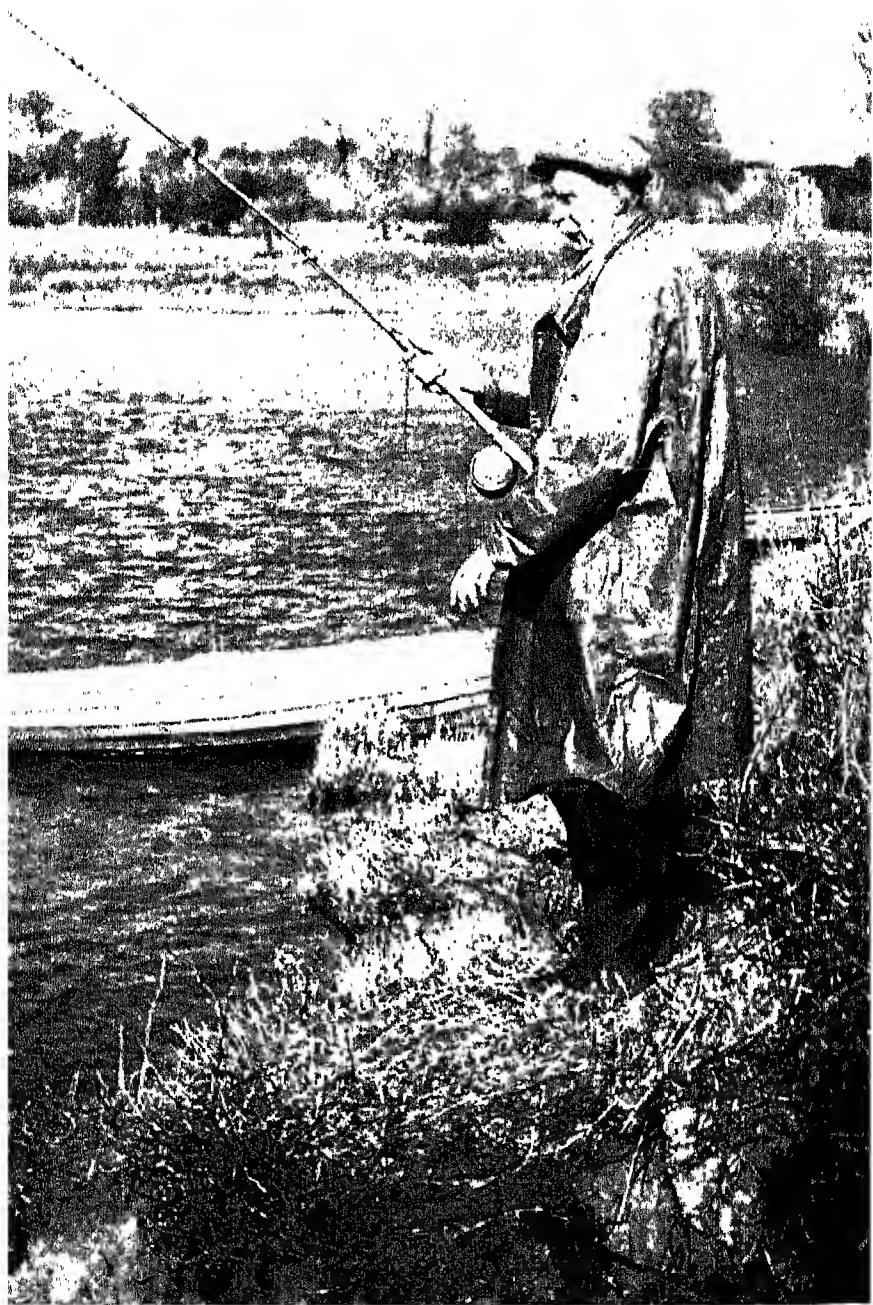


*A fine winter cod landed in the heart of the cod coast—Bridlington, Yorks*

BIG 'UNS

*The famous Ibsley water bailiff, Lt. Col. S. H. Crow, holds the barbel of 16 lb. 1 oz. foul-looking by a salmon fisherman on the Hampshire Avon. It was 1 lb. 9 oz. over the record*





*Never too early, never too late . . . William Tuohy of Castleconnell, old Shannon boatman, a fisher all his life: he fished for his living, he fished for joy*

## *Three Fishes*

releases, when I was there, was a system of clear-water rivers and streams that held a splendid head of brown and rainbow trout.

Day after day I set out after breakfast to fish the streams within easy distance of the town—Sandy Nullah, Parson's Valley and Emerald Valley. Day after day I caught trout, but a pound was the most I could manage no matter how or where I fished. I was alone and rarely met anyone once I had left the outskirts of the town—though one incident remains with me.

I was fishing Emerald Valley one morning with the rain falling in sheets, hooking plenty of trout but having difficulty in landing them from the sheer eight-foot banks. I heard a drumming of hooves and through the rain curtain a drenched and bare-headed girl cantered up and asked me the way to Hodgson's Hut, one of several hunting lodges in the district. I told her. She produced a flask and we each had a blood-warming tot of rum. She rode off into the rain and I never saw her again.

Came my last full day and agreement to share a taxi with the one other angler in the leave centre and travel the twenty miles to the Mukerti Dam. The dam holds back Mukerti Lake and the spill water forms the Paikara river, which we intended to fish. For about half-a-mile below the dam the infant Paikara is wide, swift and shallow, but it is then joined by the Mekod and becomes a fully-fledged river.

We fished industriously throughout the morning, both of us catching fish, but again with nothing above a pound. After a break for lunch I decided to try "attractor" tactics and tied on a large Butcher. Twice I cast straight before me into the deep wide pool formed by the junction of the two rivers. Twice I retrieved the fly quickly, without result. On the third cast the current at the edge of the pool swept my fly downstream until it lay at the full length of my line, all of which floated a bare foot from my own grass-covered bank. I was reeling in a yard or so of line preparatory to handlining some more in readiness for another cast when I felt the slightest of twitches. Thinking the hook had fouled a bankside twig, I jerked the line and at once felt the pull of a fish bigger than any I had hooked up to then.

As I put some strain on the line the fish moved into the pool, where it dived deep and fought itself to a finish well out of sight. At length I recovered line and soon the broad flank of a beaten fish gleamed silver below the surface as it rolled. A few moments more and it was in the net—a 2¼ lb. rainbow.

Not a fish to make a fuss about? Perhaps not. I have caught bigger trout, but none has ever given me the same feeling of utter satisfaction and of an aim achieved as did this one. It put the final touch on a leave which had swept away all the cobwebs and the staleness of war in a wretched climate. What matter that I had to start my return journey next morning? Today I was a completely contented man.

## *Three Fishes*

Put it baldly as an each-way journey of 1,700 miles for a 2½ lb. trout, and the expedition verges on madness. But it is the circumstances that count. Jason travelled farther and through manifold difficulties to get the Golden Fleece, yet I doubt if his satisfaction exceeded mine.

Khartoum, to many people who have stopped there for a few hours while their aircraft refuelled, spells a hot, sandy and thoroughly undesirable spot. To the vastly greater number of people who have never been within a thousand miles of the Sudan capital it means much the same thing, coloured for many by a backcloth of "The Four Feathers".

For me it means eighteen months of the best fishing I have ever had the luck to find.

The heat, the dust and the sand are all there in full measure, but the river atoned for a thousand discomforts.

The river was the Blue Nile, which joins the White Nile west of Khartoum. It is spanned by a road and railway bridge, and facing each other across the river just above the bridge were the two British barracks. I had the luck to be on the north side—lucky because one of the long sweeping bends of the river put the deep channel on the north side. The south side was so shallow as to be virtually unfishable—and long walks, whether loaded with fishing-tackle or not, were undesirable in that climate when the sun was up.

Many stories have been written about the fishing of the Blue Nile, but nearly all of them refer to the waters below the Sennar Dam, seventy or eighty miles upstream, where fish of such monstrous size and sporting proclivities made their homes that they attracted big game fishermen from Europe and America.

The fishing we did in the early 'thirties was on a much lower plane. My heaviest rod was a three-joint greenheart pike rod—or such was its description. I had a Silex reel, and with these two items was far better equipped than the others who took up fishing during their year's stay. In the main they used the Italian rods and small-diameter brass reels that could be bought in Khartoum. We were all well outfitted with lines, casts and hooks, for we had sent a composite order to England for these items.

When the snows melted in the Abyssinian mountains the Blue Nile came down in a turgid flood which put an end to fishing, but for nine months of the year the river ran clear and provided an abundance of fish. The finest sport we had was during the short season when tiger-fish were about. With gimp traces and any sort of spinner (or bit of fish skin) we hooked plenty—but we lost far more than we caught through the hooks failing to gain a hold or through cleanly-bitten traces.

Nile perch seemed always to be with us, and we were sometimes broken

## Three Fishes

by irresistible fish that we thought to be big fellows of this species. Our main catches, and excellent ones for the pot, consisted of *bulti*, a smaller version of the Nile perch which, to my unscientific eye, differed in no way except size from the big brothers or from the perch of British waters. I think the heaviest weighed about eight pounds.

We got some real fun from a mackerel-sized fish which admirably suited the light tackle used by most of the soldier-anglers. Very occasionally we would hook one on leger tackle fished in the 30 ft. depths by day—but as the sun started to sink beyond Omdurman, providing night after night a sunset so spectacular that all turned out to watch it—these fish came to the surface in their hundreds. They fed ravenously and would take any sort of bait or lure fished just below the surface. They fought to the end like mackerel and I've had thirty yards of line stripped off the reel by an initial rush. In twenty minutes or half-an-hour it was all over until the following evening.

I was float fishing for *bulti* one evening from a group of rocks that jutted into the river below the bridge, using float tackle and worm. I had caught a few of them weighing the normal 1 lb. to 3 lb., when my float went under with none of the usual bobbing that characterised the *bulti* bite. As I struck I realised I was into something heavier than I was used to.

While I moved back from the rocks to a safer position on a sandy beach the fish moved far out into the river and downstream of me. He had the advantage of the current, and obstacles prevented my getting below him.

I played that unseen fish with caution, but I could not be too gentle with it, for I had no more than a hundred yards of line and backing, much of which were off the reel. The strain of fish and current was, I knew, near the limit the tackle could stand. Slowly I managed to pump the fish a few yards upstream—when suddenly it encompassed its own downfall by making a long and determined rush up the river. With the fish above me I was eventually able to bring it into shallow water.

I had no landing net and intended to beach it, but no sooner had I caught sight of a broad striped side in the lessening water than a Sudanese boy dashed in, grasped the fish expertly by its gills and brought it ashore.

It was a Nile perch that balanced the kitchen scales at 25 lb. You don't keep fish hanging about in the Sudan, and it provided a course for all of us at dinner that night—but its usefulness in this direction was small part of the immense satisfaction which that perch gave me. It was the biggest freshwater fish I had ever caught, and in spite of all my subsequent fishing it still holds that position.

It didn't matter to me that across the river in the museum hung a glass-cased Nile perch weighing well over 200 lb., a fish which relatively put mine into the same class as a 7 lb. pike in Britain. I had beaten my own record,

## Three Fishes

caught a good, hard-fighting fish on light tackle, and achieved that sense of completion and inward satisfaction that comes my way all too rarely.

The third of my trio of fish was one which I didn't catch, and one which takes me back to boyhood. It lived in a homely English setting, a stretch of the Taunton Canal near Durston.

I had cycled there, as I often did, for a day's perch fishing. Most of my tackle had been passed on to me by my father and it was of good quality and more than sufficient for any fish I was likely to find in the canal, other than pike.

I was float paternostering a worm near the opposite bank at a point which I knew perch visited in their feeding travels. The float went down decisively. I struck and felt that dead pull that comes when your hook has caught a sunken branch. I shifted my angle and pulled hard—and something moved.

The line went slack, and an eel came to the surface, stayed there for some moments and then, after securing to study me intently, went down, tautened the line and snapped me with contemptuous ease.

I sat down, shaking. Never had I seen such an eel. I make no guess at its weight, but more than once I have looked at the 8½ lb. British record eel in its glass case in Veal's tackle shop in Bristol. Mine was a far bigger eel, perhaps not extravagantly longer but very much thicker.

Many things are magnified by youth. When, as an adult you return, let us say, to a school playground you last saw as a ten-year-old, the vast expanse in your memory is nothing more than a small yard. I don't think that natural magnification happened with my eel. I was fifteen, not ten, and other things I saw at the time did not appear to be smaller when I saw them again after an interval of many years.

I am still quite sure that I hooked a record eel, though how I should have dealt with it on a narrow towpath had I ever landed it is a matter for speculation.

But whenever the conversation turns to big eels I immediately see again a huge eel wallowing on the surface of a weedy canal.



*If the most self-centred of all dry-fly purists could cause to be constructed in his billiard room or library an exact, unvarnished replica of his most successful artificial magnified a hundred times, his little children would run from it with shrieks and tears.*

ANGLING CONCLUSIONS, by W. F. R. Reynolds

IEUAN D. OWEN

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*A Welsh Fly Fisherman  
Looks Back*



IEUAN D. OWEN is a banker who lives in Herefordshire. Married, two sons, two daughters, deep roots in Cardiganshire, speaks Welsh. Served in the Royal Navy 1940-45, actively commissioned in foreign waters. Published *Trout Fisherman's Saga* in 1959, contributes to leading angling magazines. Aside from being a very passionate angler, he is a rugby enthusiast, an earnest gardener, and a very keen do-it-yourself man. Dislikes snobs and threadliners.



## *A Welsh Fly Fisherman Looks Back*

IEUAN D. OWEN

NOSTALGIA is defined as "a looking back to one's past life or to past times" whilst the literal meaning of the word is "home-sickness". However, we in Wales have a more wonderful word—*hiraeth*, which has no equivalent in any other language.

Left to my own devices, my children safely in bed, my wife on the "opposite bank" of mending, knitting and sewing, there is time for reflection. Cosily settled in an armchair, pipe in mouth, a roaring fire and the family cat purring contentedly at my feet, I return to my haunts. This way I bring off many record catches, but try not to catch too many "big 'uns".

In the comfort of my home, I compete against the wariness of the wily trout and endeavour to outwit the nimble sewin. Vividly imagining the thrust of strong, rushing streams pressing against my waders. Above me, the whirling curlews cry in pleasant harmony as I fish the pools, the flats and the quiet eddies. Best of all, the "eye of the stream"—that first good eddy on the inside of any stream, after it has commenced its shoot. The water swirling, continues onwards moving quickly beneath the trees.

Meditations of this nature stir afresh memories of many joyous moments spent on the river and lake, bringing reminders of people and places of great

## *A Welsh Fly Fisherman Looks Back*

consequence to the individual. Angling "throws up its master fishers and fly dressers where it will, heedless of background, education or means".

Perhaps the most mirrored reminiscence of any angler is that impressive first cast on a boyhood stream. Cradled on the wild Welsh streams springing from a part of the country known as "The Desert of Wales", my first love was the delectable river Teify. The source of the river lies at Blaen Llinoedd Teify, where the Teify Pools collect in a nest of pearl-like lakes, reclining in a setting of undulating hills which roll away into the distance as far as the human eye can see. It is a long way by water from the birthplace of this grand river to Cardigan bridge and the estuary where the mature river meets the sea.

At the head of the valley it is youthful, cascading and cataracting along a ravined course falling rapidly towards Ystrad Fflur (The Valley of Blossom), the thirteenth century remains of a Cistercian Monastery and the very old village church. Full of energy it leaves behind the ruined historical monument. Passing beneath the humped back stone bridge at Pontrhydyfendigaid (The Bridge of the Blessed Ford), it babbles hurriedly onwards eager to enter the largest bog in Great Britain, that of Gors Goch Caron, six miles long and from one to two miles wide. Declared a Nature Reserve, the bog provides sanctuary for many species of wild birds and wild fowl. It is a breeding place for the lesser black-backed gull. Flocks of wild geese, visitants from the Shetlands and Norway come here during hard wintry weather.

The call of a pce-wit or the song of a skylark comes loudly across the bent grass and sphagnum. There is a peace which passeth a townsman's understanding.

Down river Pont Llanio lies in the centre of the Tregaron Angling Association water. It is easily accessible and popular. The fishing meets the requirements of the fly-fishing connoisseur, providing for dry fly, wet fly and nymph. A variety of changes satisfy the likes of all three.

For me, angling on the Teify, especially at Tregaron, is linked with the name of my mentor Dai Lewis. Of course, there are others connected with those early days. High sounding names like Roberts the Plumber, Herbert Pwll, Billo White, Davies Castle Green and Jenkins the Whip. They all readily offered a helping hand and gave advice to an inquisitive eager school-boy.

My more risible moments visualise the approaches to Llendu, where a figure could always be seen sitting on a stool, perched over his favourite pool. Clad in a bowler hat and an overcoat greening with age, John Coed-y-Gof sported a garb of natural camouflage. Unfortunately, John's tackle, too, was only renewed as often as his attire, resulting in dire consequences. Whenever a salmon was lost (and it happened frequently) he would swear voluminosly,

## *A Welsh Fly Fisherman Looks Back*

freely venting his Welsh imprecations. Nevertheless, he was a likeable and very amusing country character.

John always set me thinking of the ghillie and the bishop. The former was given to cursing rather hotly and loosely whenever the efforts of his episcopal pupil upset him. Eventually, the bishop reprimanded him for the use of such bad language. He asked him, "Where on earth did you learn to swear like that?" Whereupon, the ghillie modestly replied, "Sir, you can't learn it—it's a gift!"

John took risks with his tackle. I find lots of fishermen do so, sometimes unknowingly, all the same they can pay dearly for oversights. Many a fine specimen has gained freedom because of the momentary neglectfulness of the angler. It is so easy to be wise after the event, when the fish of a lifetime has been lost. These opportunities may come but once. Therefore, make a practice of examining lines frequently, the security of knots, casts for fraying, hooks for blunt barbs and broken points. Any of these can give trouble following a snagging or after continual casting amongst rocks or between boulders. The advice may sound simple, the precautions involved, notwithstanding, are very necessary.

Rivers like the Teify, Towy, Cothi, Irfon, Ystwyth, Rheidol, Usk and Upper Wye, together with their ancillary streams, provide superb rough stream fishing. In their higher reaches where these rivers tumble wildly, enjoying the gay abandon of childish ecstasy, they are well worth a visit. In their travels they cover the most lonely country bespeckled with rowans and beeches, amidst a carpeting of bracken.

I derive great enjoyment from fishing dry fly on rough streams. By this, I mean, fishing a floating fly at the time when (and in places where) the fish are prepared to take it. Trout are not often seen rising freely on the broken water, but this does not mean they would not like to do so, given the opportunity. No regular hatch of fly is evident. Food is scanty, so they have to constantly forage in search of it. Because of this, when offered a good mouthful on the surface, they will more often than not come up and take the fly. Small on average by chalk stream standards, their size does not leave them lacking in fighting spirit. A newcomer to their midst is often surprised by their liveliness.

Many casting problems are encountered on these water surfaces, yet when overcome, they serve to considerably widen practical experience.

Good presentation and a fine sense of watermanship are the most essential attributes. Any serious angler knows only too well, how these qualities bring their reward anywhere. Chuck and chance methods rarely produce the successes gained from a more studied method of approach. Likewise, in shooting, one has to settle on a bird and concentrate on it. Firing wildly into

## *A Welsh Fly Fisherman Looks Back*

the midst of a fast rising covey of partridge reaps no reward. It will not earn a much needed neck required for those quiet fly-tying moments.

It does not pay to be dogmatic in the sport of fishing. The unphilosophical actions of the small boy carrying a stick, the proverbial piece of string and a bunch of worms brings results under favourable conditions. He often takes a good fish, contrary to all the ethics of angling. The colonel found this out. He had flogged his private stretch all the morning and had nothing to show for his efforts. Reaching the end of his beat, he was preparing to leave when to his amusement a little boy arrived from nearby. Encumbered with stick, string and worms he commenced to fish, flinging the bait nonchalantly into the stream. He did not have to wait long before being in luck. Unceremoniously he heaved out a sizeable sewin, much to the disgust of the onlooking colonel. Dropping everything, he seized the fish in his hands and ran off with it to show his mother.

"What have you got there, Johnny?" she asked.

"Well, I don't really know, Mum," came the reply. "But the gentleman down there by the river called it 'the bloody limit'."

Whatever the circumstances, allowances have to be made for the unexpected. Things do not always turn out as anticipated. The brotherhood of anglers is frequently faced with adverse problems beyond its control. Every good intention, the planning, the decisions formulated en route to the water go into jeopardy because of some unforeseen circumstances. All the same, it does not deter the keen angler from achieving what he really set out to do. People unconverted to our ways think we are mad. Perhaps we are, if so, madness has its compensations.

I can give no better illustration of the zest in an angler than to quote the eventful experience which befell a professional friend of mine. None could be more ardent than he. Immediately on arrival from the city he went down on the beat to look around. That evening he was going after a sewin. His pool chosen, he decided to cut back some of the bank growth. It was this resolution which sparked off a run of misfortune. A luckless step sent him headlong down the bank resulting in a broken limb. His leg duly encased in plaster he instructed his companions to collect a few beer cases and take them down on the gravelly surrounds of the pool. He was then carried down and set up in position on the boxes to carry on fishing. His luck changing temporarily, he hooked a splendid fish. A pal ran to his aid, but whilst manoeuvring into position he got himself hooked to a dropper fly by the scalp. As you can well imagine, pandemonium prevailed. The hooked sewin full of fight, the pal securely caught by the head and my friend laughing his head off. Needless to say the fish was lost.

More often than not, most of our failures are due to over anxiousness. It

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is not difficult to pick out a relaxed, confident fly angler. His easy rhythmic casting, eyes searching the water surface for any signs of movement gives pleasure even to the onlooker. No time is wasted covering unproductive places. He knows where to look for and expect fish. Naturally the local scores over the stranger on home ground. He knows his river well and is acquainted with the most remunerative lies. If one watches a good fisherman of experience on a strange beat, he never hurries himself. On the contrary, his first action is to take a good look around carefully reading the water before he ever commences to fish. Moreover, when a good fish rises to the natural he considers every possible line of approach, eventually deciding on the most advantageous before ever putting his own fly down on the water. A direct cast over a fish is not always the best in river fishing. Very often a side approach is better or even floating the fly down towards the quarry from above, meets the problem. But, remember always to keep off the skyline and make use of every available bit of cover. Fish close to a fish whenever possible.

Success in angling depends partly on what an angler does and partly on what he refrains from doing. The real source of angling knowledge is experience. This builds up over the years. The expert approaches every day's fishing with an open mind. Experiences are real and what happens on the stream adds or deflects from the store of knowledge already gained. The certainties of yesterday may be the doubts of today.

Anglers evolve their own theories. In rough streams I like to fish two dry-flies on my cast, whilst in lake fishing I mount a dry-fly on the dropper and a wet-fly, preferably of the spider type on the point. I am no purist. I adapt myself the best I can to prevailing conditions. It pays to ring the changes as and when necessary.

Some of the more zealous riparian owners in Wales cling most rigidly to the old beliefs. Despite this day and age they denounce Sunday fishing. One admires their principles, naturally, but personally I am easy, I fish if I feel like it.

I can well remember a friend persuading a villager from a locality where such narrow mindedness prevailed to take him fishing on the Sabbath. Everything went well when suddenly William turned to my friend saying, "Quick! drop your rod in the grass, mister".

"What for?" enquired my friend, surprised by the sudden request.

"Now do as I tell you, there's a good chap, they are coming from chapel!"

"What's that got to do with it?" remarked my peeved friend.

"Everything", replied William.

"Look", said my friend, "out here on the meadow we are nearer to God than what they are, and besides, God will forgive us".

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"Yes indeed", answered William, "God will, no doubt, forgive us, but that damn lot won't!"

It takes all sorts.

Fly-tying discloses unexpected talents in the most inexplicable environments. It is an art I am always ready to learn. One can always learn something from a good fly dresser. Dai Lewis was a brilliant maker of flies. I have yet to meet anyone who worked faster than he. His dry flies never failed to float, continuing to do so even when battered and torn. However, surprises frequently arise in the sport of angling. Sammy is one of them. A quiet, casual unassuming person who loves talking fishing, one hardly thought of him as capable of dressing a fly. But, he can as I was soon to learn. Anchored to his vice, Sammy is in a world of his own. Fingers move briskly and easily as each motion skilfully completes the task.

When I first entered his room it savoured strongly of the professional fly-tyer. The table overflowed with necks of feathers, skins of this and tails of that, silks, tinsels and hooks. So was the floor strewn with materials in addition to several boxes lying around. In the corner was a half completed rod and resting beside it, his own salmon and trout rods. Salmon lures lurked everywhere in boxes, traces hung from wall hooks and the small mantles shelf held odd flies and lures. When Sammy commenced to perform my interest was fully concentrated, my mind closed to all else. The vice, the hook, the moving fingers applying and tying materials to build a neat fly in the finish, captivated my eyes. I had learnt a good deal from the great Dai—now Sammy taught me something new. Although I dress my own flies I was fascinated. I could have gone on watching him at work for hours. Memories of the past flowed in filling my cup to the brim. Before I left I had learnt a magnificent pattern of the *Coch-y-Bonddhu*—and it is an exclusive one—together with a dressing of the Red Spinner which is a *real* Red Spinner without any shadow of doubt.

Unheralded, these fellows carry on. No frills, no pomposity. Glad to please and be admired by their angling friends. Dai had his friends around him always when at home. He was a great entertainer, full of wit. Any spoils coming his way were readily shared with his friends. A Midland executive proposed spending a fishing vacation at Tregaron. Preparing for the visit he instructed his secretary to forward his rods to Dai giving him certain instructions. At the same time he arranged for a case containing half a dozen bottles of whisky to be consigned to his hotel. Due to a misunderstanding, the secretary inadvertently addressed the heartening liquor to Dai.

Dai made the most of the windfall. He invited his friends to share his good fortune and the celebrations commenced. When the executive arrived, there was no case of whisky awaiting him as expected. Numerous enquiries were

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made and eventually the carrier was seen. He remembered delivering a case of something with the rods. He called to retrieve it, but was wasting his time. Only half a bottle of the stuff remained! Dai and his friends had drunk the gentleman's health with a vengeance.

The still waters of the natural lakes (and there are many) combined with the Elan Valley Fishery and those newly constructed reservoirs at Nant-y-Moch and Dinas on the upper Rheidol above Ponterwyd, all offer enjoyable sport. A stiff climb towards the higher contours, a three mile tramp through heather over peat ground covered in tufted grass, along weathered sheep tracks in search of an insignificant natural lake—that is my conception of complete enjoyment.

How can you fail to relax when you walk to the accompaniment of calling curlews, the croak of ravens, the whirring wings of fast fleeing grouse, the occasional bark of a fox from across the valley? Whilst above, swooping and diving, hawks and kites search their prey.

The dark patch of water yields magnificent yellow bellied, beautifully spotted brown trout, ranging from a quarter to two pounds. A worthy reward for your effort. The walk alone is worthwhile, if only to leave behind and forget the trials and tribulations of daily routine.

I shall go again, many times, whilst I can walk, to the friendly little lake high up in the hills. I count my blessings as many. Born a countryman, I live like one.

It was Richard Jeffries who wrote—

*"The hours that the mind is absorbed by beauty are the only hours that we really live, so that the longer we stay among these things, the more is snatched from inevitable time."*

Rod in hand, nostalgia calls me, "hiraeth" leads me on. I shall frequent these waters, fishing them until I die.



*A number of my fellow fishermen have a habit of working the rod up and down while fishing the fly round. This manoeuvre has, I think, little to recommend it, and several drawbacks. I am told that it gives life to the fly. In my view it does the very opposite. At one moment the fly is being pulled through the water unnecessarily fast, at the next it checks altogether. The result is that it is constantly, on being checked, dropping back from a horizontal into a partly vertical position. No fish can swim like this. No fly should do so either.*

FLY FISHING FOR SALMON, by Richard Waddington





F. W. HOLIDAY

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*A Matter of Prestige*

F. W. HOLIDAY started fishing in Cheshire at the age of seven, extended his experience in Canada when the family moved there, and further extended it in Africa and the Middle East while serving with the R.A.F. He spends his days farming, fishing, and writing about fishing. His favourite kind of angling is fishing for sea-trout with the wet fly. He is 43, a bachelor, and is addicted to expensive rods, tobacco, and prolific beats on choice and costly rivers. Spends most of his holidays in Scotland, fishing and investigating the Loch Ness monster.



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F. W. HOLIDAY

SHEIKH MOHAMMED BEN ALI was a wicked old reprobate. Pinch-nosed, he wore the double black rings of Islam on his head as a cynical reminder that he had the best of both worlds. He certainly had the best of this one since his estimated income from oil of fifty million sterling per annum was probably an under-estimate. He had six personal aircraft, thirty-five chauffeur-driven limousines and two acres of harem. He also had misgivings.

With considerably more difficulty than he was used to, the Sheikh had inveigled Salem, his ninth son, into Eton College. Salem—a tall dark boy with the pendulous under-lip of a camel and a slight cast in one eye—had failed to impress the headmaster of that august establishment. But it is amazing what a little overt pressure can do in the sphere of education when half the oil-wells in the Middle East threaten to close down.

In due course Salem returned to his father with a strange nasal accent, a curious tie and certain weird notions about the universal fitness of things.

"The English must be studied as one studies the udder of a she-ass before purchase," the youth told his sire. "The great Sir Lionel should be grasped firmly as one grasps the prickly acacia growing round the almond-tree."

Sir Lionel Bloggs, Her Majesty's Ambassador to the kingdom of Karein, had been a thorn in the Sheikh's side for many years. It was certainly not what he did; nor was it what he said. It was rather what he didn't say. It was the manner he twitched his well-bred nostrils. It screamed aloud from every

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flick of his starched cuffs. It howled from the flawless cut of his morning coat. "Unfortunately we have got to have your damned oil," he seemed to sniff, "at no matter what shocking cost."

Sheikh Mohammed felt that he himself was included on the debit side of the deal and his soul squirmed within him. More than anything in life he wanted to see Sir Lionel cut down to size.

Although Sir Lionel didn't know it, his cook, gardener and under-secretary for local affairs were all spies in the Sheikh's employ. In their various ways, each searched for the Ambassador's Achilles Heel. But it was hopeless. He was sober, diligent, polite and utterly incorruptible. He took plague, pillage, arson and war in his urbane stride as a matter of course. You couldn't puncture Sir Lionel's monumental aplomb in any way whatsoever. It was quite maddening.

But one night, at the end of Ramadan, a smirking figure was ushered, bowing, into the Sheikh's gorgeous apartment. The man slipped something into his master's palm, spoke his message, prostrated on the four-inch thick carpet and withdrew.

The Sheikh sent for his son Salem and together they studied their find with interest. The Sheikh pointed at the object.

"These things he makes by the hour in the privy of his chamber. It is a secret known to few."

Salem then grinned a thin grin for all was suddenly made plain.

"Allah in His wisdom has delivered a plucked quail into our hand. This trinket is an artificial fly. And Sir Lionel is an angler."

"An angler?" queried the Sheikh whose knowledge of western ways ran in somewhat limited channels.

"They are fishermen for the sport of it," Salem explained. "It is a form of English lunacy easily handled by one like thyself, O father, whose eyes shine as moons with the splendour of sublime wisdom."

Sheikh Mohammed smiled and preened his white goatce with genuine pleasure. Tomorrow he would have to order Salem a new Rolls Phantom V. Clearly an intelligent youth, this one.

Sheikh Mohammed set about Sir Lionel's undoing with infinite care and wicked delight. First of all he had two large pools constructed, each tastefully surrounded with palms and bougainvillea with lots of room for spectators. He then gave certain instructions regarding these pools. Finally he sent the Ambassador an invitation.

"To come angling," Sir Lionel said, reading it aloud to his wife. "How extraordinary. How on earth does he know that one fishes?"

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"They know everything," Lady Cynthia said philosophically. "I had better have your things laid out. Do you need all those fly-boxes and what not? Goodness knows what use they will be in a desert."

"The first thing one learns, my dear, is never to underrate the opposition," the Ambassador murmured mildly.

Later in the day the embassy car threaded its way through a concourse of villagers and as the sun sank in the west like a scarlet geranium Sir Lionel, tall and wan in tropical whites, stepped out beside Sheikh Mohammed's splendid angling pools. The Sheikh's bodyguard, in quite remarkable uniforms, clashed to attention. A band jarred into the national anthem and perpetrated it with no more than six discords. Sir Lionel returned the salute and smiled benignly.

"Sir Lionel—how very nice," grinned the Sheikh. "Our insignificant garden is a thousand times honoured. May our fish be worthy of such patronage!"

"Do have a cast or two, sir," Salem said solicitously from the Ambassador's elbow. "There's some awfully decent trout in this water. I'll gillie if you like."

Sir Lionel looked at the pool. It was very lovely. Date palms brooded over their own reflections. The sandy beaches were as white as bone. And out in the middle a big trout was rising with all the unreal perfection of a fish in a Halford first edition.

What did one use on a trout in an eastern desert browsing on insects with unknown names? No matter. Sir Lionel tied on a Pale Watery spinner. "When in doubt, try owt," his old Yorkshire gamekeeper used to say, back home.

Maybe it was the bright light or maybe it was all those goes of malaria at bad stations; but he muffed the cast. The fly pecked the water like a well-flung dart and the trout went down like a Sputnik with re-entry problems. The Ambassador tried hard to rise it but failed.

"We had better try the other pool," smiled the Sheikh after a discreet interval. "Perhaps you will watch me—yes? It is a very pleasant sport, this feeshing."

A dozen retainers carried the Sheikh's fishing-tackle. The rods ranged from vintage Leonards to super-special Hardys studded with first-water diamonds. Two slaves staggered under a crate of reels. Passing through the trees the party arrived at the next pool. Sheikh Mohammed flashed a crooked grin as he selected a stubby little bait rod with gold fittings and a jade handle on which his name was picked out in carnelians. The hook was duly baited and he cast it into the pool.

Almost at once some monstrous marine creature seized the bait and nearly

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pulled the Sheikh off his feet. Servants sprang to the aid of their master. In due course a fish several feet long was dragged ashore.

"Let Allah be praised! There is enough here to feed the entire village," the old man chortled. "Is it not so, Sir Lionel?"

"Quite remarkable," murmured the Ambassador without flickering an eyelid.

The Sheikh caught a round dozen fish, each larger than the last, and then collapsed weakly on a rug placed below his posterior by watchful henchmen. He seemed in danger of choking with mirth and only revived after a tumbler of liqueur brandy had been passed under his beard.

"And now we will return to the other pool and watch Sir Lionel catch his spotted English fish," he croaked, stroking aching sides. "Hospitality demands an equal sharing of the sport." When this message had been tossed back through the crowd it laughed itself hoarse. Salein grinned sheepishly at Sir Lionel and had the grace to blush. This was rather like seeing one's housemaster with his trousers down.

Rarely has prestige depended so much on the fall of a fly. Sir Lionel of course now saw it all—the Sheikh's pool heavily stocked with great hungry fish netted out of the River Euphrates. And his own pool containing only a few wary imported trout. He was outgunned and outflanked—nearly.

The crowd fell silent as he stripped off his crisp white jacket and stared in disbelief as he crawled to the pool's edge. Even the Sheikh was staring because this was the first time he had ever seen the Ambassador behaving other than formally.

Where the water lapped the sand was a little line of water-borne debris. And out of the debris, onto Sir Lionel's extended finger, crawled a small yellow dun with wings like buttercup petals. He held it for a moment almost lovingly for here was the answer to his problem.

Then, in the middle of the pool as before, the big trout tilted and slowly extended a black neb to the surface. The rise-ripples spread outwards and the palm reflections wavered delicately in the evening light.

This time Sir Lionel made no mistakes. The Yellow Sally—it had been dressed years ago in an hotel bedroom during tedious diplomatic conferences—projected almost languidly over the water. It seemed to hesitate and—as it were—hover. Then it kissed the surface-film.

The trout moved casually. It opened a bored mouth, sucked, and turned away. And it was hooked.

Sir Lionel's line sizzled through the crystal water as if electrified. His elderly and much-varnished rod bent like a bow. The reel, which had once belonged to his father, gave a well-bred purr of approval at the way things were going.

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The trout bounded from the water with mouth agape, the Yellow Sally pendant from its scissors like some novel form of side-whisker. It was a very angry fish. Being scooped from the placid waters of a Hampshire trout-farm was bad enough. To be flown to foreign parts by special aircraft in a plastic tank and to be sustained only by squirts of oxygen was a good deal worse. To be tricked into swallowing a tasteless yellow thing made of mohair and dried chicken-feathers was the absolute limit.

Sir Lionel was wet to the knees before the battle at last went his way. He had lost his hat and his collar was loose. His shirt was blotched with dust and needed ironing. The big trout was now making slow swirls on the surface and the critical moment of landing was near at hand. The Ambassador stretched out a hand for someone to pass him the net.

The great trouble was that the Sheikh, inching forward to watch the spectacle, was now resting his feet squarely on the landing-net handle. And no-one dared commit the dangerous sacrilege of yanking the net away. Salem opened his mouth to explain but simply ended up gasping and pointing dramatically like a ham actor in *Macbeth* who suddenly sees a real ghost.

All at once the Sheikh saw what was wanted. He moved almost nimbly. As he charged, net at the ready, to Sir Lionel's succour, the twin black rings of Islam tilted over his forehead to give him almost a gay look. The big trout flopped into the extended mesh with almost cynical disgust. For the trout, this was where it came in. Life could hold no further surprises.

Sir Lionel told the rest of the story to his wife later in the evening after he had swallowed a much-needed John Collins and changed his clobber for something presentable.

"It so happened that it was the only fish in the pool—the rest expired due to the heat on arrival. Old Mohammed thought he'd make me lose a bit of face over the set-up. But everyone ended up thinking the fly-fishing performance was rather remarkable and slightly magical. The old boy's now ordering trout-pools all over the shop and he's actually borrowed my fly-tying kit."

"He's quite a likeable old villain," agreed Lady Cynthia. "But I do wish he wouldn't eat garlic and spit in the fireplace."



*If ever you wish to recapture youth, leaving behind a broken old body with its cares, go to County Mayo for a month or so.*

ANGLING CONCLUSIONS, by W. F. R. Reynolds





HOWARD MARSHALL

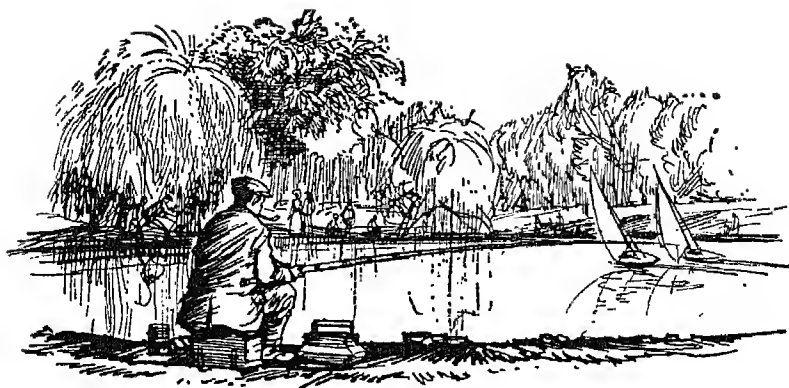
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*The Rushers and the  
Stickers*

HOWARD MARSHALL is one of the most celebrated radio commentators of our time, still remembered for his golden voice and measured judgments though it is now a long time since he was on the air. Co-founder with Bernard Venables of *Angling Times*, of which he is a director, he is interested in publishing as well as fishing, and is as keen on roach as on trout. Has his own stretch of the Lambourn, tributary of the Kennet, and also travels widely to fish.



## *The Rushers and the Stickers*

HOWARD MARSHALL

ALWAYS I COME BACK to the little river. The fact that I am fortunate enough to live on its banks is beside the point. If I lived a hundred miles away I should still return to this gin-clear stream and its golden trout. These trout are not big, but they are plump and wild and beautifully shaped, and they weed you more swiftly and decisively than any trout I know.

The river is a chalk-stream in miniature, with all the characteristics of its bigger brethren the Kennet, the Test and the Itchen. Indeed, it flows into the Kennet through a dark and inconspicuous culvert beneath the Bath road, and a friend of mine who lives on this modest confluence caught with a dry fly, and standing virtually on his own doorstep, a noble trout, deep and thick and weighing  $6\frac{1}{4}$  lbs.

Such visiting leviathans provide the charm of the unexpected, but we do not altogether welcome them. They are out of scale. They destroy the proportion of things. Last September I put a fly over a quiet dimple under the far bank, and a great neb came up and absorbed it and turned down. When I tightened after a delay caused more by shock than good timing I felt momentarily that I had hooked a brick wall. Then there was a vast boil and an explosion and a huge trout leapt clear of the water, skeetered along on his shovel of a tail and came down fairly and squarely and conclusively on my 5x nylon.

He was a big fish. A very big fish, certainly over four pounds, and yet, as I watched the waves spreading where he indignantly shouldered his way up-stream like an All Black forward driving through a maul, I was not altogether sorry. A little sad at my own usual incompetence, perhaps, but

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this visitor from the Kennet, searching for spawning grounds, was right out of his league. He had nothing in common with my lively little trout. He made my river look like a ditch. I was glad to see the last of him.

Sour grapes, you may say, but I do not really think so. Had I lost so large a fish on the Kennet I should have been more than sad. I should probably have felt like snapping my rod across my knee. In the Kennet such a fish would have fitted into the pattern. He would have been expected, and the angler would have been equipped to deal with him. Not that equipment is enough. The margin of human error is wide, and we are all potential bunglers with a fly-rod in our hands.

Especially when we find a great trout rising steadily, and our knees begin to tremble slightly and our breathing is somewhat irregular and our fingers refuse to deal with the minor intricacies of a half blood knot. Especially then are we liable to bang the fly down so heavily over the trout's head that he sidles contemptuously under the nearest weed-bed to take cover until we have gone. Trout are downright insulting when they do this. They show no panic. They merely let us see that they are perfectly aware of our intentions, but that there is a limit to their patience. This can be rather humiliating if it happens too often. It can even lead to bad temper.

I remember an otherwise tranquil friend of mine who suffered this indignity rather frequently under a July sun until suddenly he cried, "I did not come here to be sneered at by a trout. I shall never fish again"; and with that he tried to make the ritual gesture of breaking his rod and hurling it into the river. Unfortunately he was using a tough glass rod, and strain though he might he could make no impression on it, no satisfactorily dramatic smash, no sharp rending of timber. All he could do, in this faintly ridiculous situation, was to yield to his sense of humour and carry on fishing.

For all that, I know how my friend felt. In this little river the water is so pellucid and so relatively shallow that the angler can see every happening, every pebble in the golden gravel, every movement of a fin. Looking at a trout poised motionless in a run between weed-beds you might think you were looking at a Chinese water painting, and when you cast your fly, however delicately, the falling nylon seems to splinter the crystal surface into a cracked window pane. All this, of course, is part of the delight of this miniature fishing, and gives it, as the poet Yeats said, "the fascination of what's difficult".

It poses also certain problems of equipment. The weaver's beam which served our forefathers as a rod in all conditions would be sadly out of place. It was evolved, this stiff, heavy, powerful type of rod, to cope with the downstream winds which blow so often on the chalk-streams, and doubtless it served its purpose, though at what a cost of fishermen's elbows and weary

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wrists I would not like to say. The great G. E. M. Skues was a protagonist of the less ponderous rod, though even he thought he was fishing fantastically light when he used the W.B.R.—the world's best rod, as he called it—a nine foot Leonard weighing about six ounces. He preached the doctrine that lightness of delivery is all, and he noted with approval that a  $2\frac{1}{2}$  lb. trout was taken in heavily weeded Itchen water on a little Leonard weighing only  $2\frac{1}{2}$  ounces.

It is a fact of no earth-shattering importance, but I find myself using a split cane rod 6 ft. 10 in. long and weighing only quarter of an ounce more than that little Leonard. I came to this by stages. First an old Rugger injury caught up with me and put my right arm out of action, so that I had to learn to cast with my left. This was for me most interesting, since all the casting tricks which I had practised intuitively with my right hand had to be analysed, rationalised and deliberately applied with the left hand. I was never a good caster, and now I never shall be one, but I catch a trout now and again, and at least I know what I am trying to do. And one of my endeavours is to make up for loss of distance by fishing as lightly and delicately as possible. Not that I succeed very often, but a tiny tooth-pick of a rod at least makes it feasible.

It must be a sympathetic tooth-pick which will persuade the fly out even into a wind. A little stiff poker of a rod is useless. Fly-fishing should be a matter of finesse rather than force, and when you find yourself stroking the line out with a rod which works down to the hand things are not going so badly.

There is, I believe, a tendency towards the use of shorter and lighter trout rods, a tendency which justifies itself at the end of a day's hard casting into a headwind. It presupposes a different approach to fly fishing, a search for the trout within range instead of an exercise in tossing the caber.

The great casters will smile (tolerantly, I hope) at this whimsy, and continue to send their lines whistling across the widest reaches of the Kennet to take the unapproachable trout under the far bank. They are wonderful to watch, these Cinquevallis of the fly-rod, and they catch big fish. But I know my place. I could not at any time emulate them, and it is a considerable relief not to have to try.

On the little river there is no room for emulation, and nothing calls for tests of physical prowess. Our problems are within range; given a little low cunning and a modicum of skill. It is true that we may have to creep and crawl a bit to keep under cover, and that the banks are marshy in places and may claim a gum-boot or two before they let us go. And there are cattle. And nothing can be more exasperating than a herd of bullocks. Inquisitive bullocks. And they are always inquisitive. These hazards, however, are common to any South country trout stream, and with them are invariably

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to be found such irritants as horse-flies, herons, swans, ducks, moorhens, dabchicks and the rest. Sometimes, when you are doing badly and a north-east wind is tearing and buffeting its way down stream, sometimes you feel that you must be fishing in a kind of lunatic Zoo with all the inmates dancing derisively around you.

The fact is that you rarely notice these manifestations of nature. It is often said that one of the virtues of trout fishing is that it gives you glimpses of wild animals and birds in their natural environment. The drumming of the snipe over the water-meadows or the eerie cry of the plover in spring are supposed to compensate us for standing up to our knees in mud with our fly firmly fixed to the branch of a tree behind us just as we have found a rising fish. It may be so. The man of creative imagination may find his solace in the flash of a kingfisher, but for most of us the fishing is the thing. I do not suppose that the stockbroker, escaping from the City at the weekend, drives eighty miles and dresses up in thigh boots and fishing jacket and a most peculiar waterproof hat in order to hear the drumming of the snipe. He knows that fishing consists of a series of misadventures interspersed by occasional moments of glory, and that to achieve the glory he must concentrate on the matter in hand.

Concentration is the secret of success, and it is remarkable how anglers cultivate this rare habit of mind. I remember once in Africa, using the aerial from a scout car for a rod and trying to catch anything that swam in the yellow river which swirled at my feet, I was startled by the voice of a game-warden. "I hope", he said, "that the elephants didn't disturb you?" "Elephants?" I said, "What elephants?" "Oh," replied the warden, "a herd of about thirty passed about twenty yards behind you just now, on their way to a drinking pool. We were quite worried about you for a bit." I don't wonder that they were worried about me. I should have been worried about myself if I had known, but I was concentrating, and I caught some of the most villainous-looking fish I'd ever seen.

There are, I think, two main classes of fly-fishers, the Rushers and the Stickers. The Rushers are haunted by the belief that there is always a better fish rising round the next corner, so they are ever on the move, rushing up the bank from rise to rise, confident that one day they will come upon Moby Dick. The Stickers are either more patient or more lethargic men, and having found what seems to them a promising place they stay there and wait for the trout to show themselves.

If I am a Sticker, and I think I am, it is partly through laziness, and partly because there is no place for Rushers on the little river. They would go through it like a knife through butter, and put down all the fish for the rest of the day. You cannot take liberties with the little river or its trout. If you

## *The Rushers and the Stickers*

do not move slowly and stealthily, like an overweight Red Indian, the fish will scatter before you, sending their brethren to cover as they go. It is indeed wiser not to move at all for considerable periods, but to wait and watch for the movement under water or the dark shapes sliding out from beneath the weed-beds to take up position before the main hatch of fly begins.

And it is surprising how many trout will appear in a stretch which an hour before seemed to hold no fish whatever, but then trout are surprising creatures. The other day I was watching a small boy throwing bread to ducks from a road bridge when suddenly a large trout loomed up from the depths of the bridge pool. He took a quick look round to size up the situation, and then launched himself into the attack. He snatched pieces of bread from under the ducks' bills. He rammed ducks amidships like a torpedo. He spread such alarm and confusion among the ducks that they withdrew angrily and left him to feast alone, but having asserted his sovereignty he sank, slowly and with dignity, into the dark recesses of his domain.

But for the boy and the bread I should probably never have seen that trout, except perhaps in Mayfly time, but I do not like the Mayfly fortnight on my tiny chalk-stream. It is useful, maybe, for reconnaissance purposes, for marking down the big fish in the hope that they will be moving to B.W.O. or sedge later in the year; but for fishing it is a mockery. In so small and clear a stream it is too easy. It is murder. It robs the trout of all caution, and nullifies the hazards which make fishing in this water so fascinating. This great fly, drifting down like a galleon under full sail, this remarkable fly gets everything out of perspective, and I could well do without it altogether. Indeed, I do manage to do without it—by going to fish elsewhere during the fortnight, by wrenching myself away to places where the contrast is sharpest, to the great trout of Sheelin or the enchanted lochs of Perthshire. But always I return, and always the deep feelings of relief and gratitude accompany me to the marshy banks of the little river.



*There should be a burn in every fisherman's life—and preferably at the beginning of it. When he is too stiff to crawl and too old for hard manual labour, it will be too late, although it may still teach him more about fishing than he ever dreamed was possible. A burn is a poor man's paradise and an education without a rival.*

FISHING AND FLYING, by Terence Horsley





T. K. WILSON

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*Yorkshire Has The Lot*

T. K. WILSON died while this book was in the press. He had fished for more than 56 years and had written about fishing and country life for more than forty. He was a regular contributor to the *Yorkshire Evening Post* and *Sports Post*, *The Dalesman*, *Trout and Salmon*, *Angling Times*, *Fishing*, *The Field*, *Angling*, and *Fishing Gazette*. Author of *The Angler's Scrapbooks*, *The Trout Spinner's Companion*, and *The Northern Angler's Handbook*. This hymn in praise of his native county must be one of the last things written by the keen old railwayman, a stalwart of the old school, who will be missed far beyond the boundaries of the Yorkshire he loved so much.



## *Yorkshire Has The Lot*

T. K. WILSON

I LIKE THE STORY of the visiting Scotsman whose creel held a fine lot of Wharfe trout at the end of a day's fly-fishing. Back at his hotel, over an evening pint with a local rod, he confessed that he had not expected to enjoy such sport this side of the border.

"Maybe not; maybe not," came the reply, "but tha happens to be in Yorkshire."

Though your present-day angler is less localised than formerly, thanks to motor transport and a five-day working week, where and how a man wets a line, and whether he becomes a game, coarse or sea fisherman, still depends to a considerable degree on the opportunities afforded by the surroundings into which he has been born.

If a kindly fate has cast his lot in Yorkshire, there is precious little in the whole of the pastime that is not to be found somewhere in the county's broad acres.

Respecting rain-fed rivers, if our claim ended with the Ouse, we should have more than our fair share, for it serves as parent to seven quite long rivers that come tumbling down from the Pennines through pent-up dales lands into outspreading valleys. They, in their turn, are at the receiving end of a hundred and one fascinating fell becks and, in their middle and lower reaches, of scores of streams up to twenty miles long.

Down their main courses alone these seven rivers have an aggregate of over five hundred miles, while the Ouse proper, which rises at Ouseburn, and does not come into being where Swale and Ure merge, as many suppose, has a sixty-mile run before it merges with the Nottinghamshire Trent to form the Humber.

This consideration of the Ouse watershed takes no note of the fact that

## *Yorkshire Has The Lot*

some of the main rivers have also incoming feeders that are rivers in their own right. The Aire collects the fifty mile long Calder, while the Derwent annexes the forty miles of the Rye.

Actually the Derwent is somewhat of an interloper, for after a comparatively short course through Forge Valley it once flowed eastward to the sea near Scarborough. An upheaval away back in those far distant times when this old land of ours was making some final adjustments as it settled down, turned its waters westward down the Vale of Pickering.

In their entirety the Ouse and its related rivers, streams and becks will readily pass the thousand mark with mileage in hand to cover once good fishing sacrificed to pollution from our highly industrialised areas. As well as the blessings, we also have the ills that beset our pastime.

The Aire, longest of all the Ouse's tributaries, has suffered sadly, a mere twenty of its 88½ miles now interesting the angler. What the Leeds and Bradford areas have done for the Aire, those of Sheffield and Rotherham have done for the lower forty-five miles of the Don.

On a more pleasing note, let me add, that some sixteen miles of the Calder, which round the end of last century was described as "nothing more than an inky cesspool", have now been brought back again into angling circulation as an improving coarse fishery.

Though small as rivers go, with mileages that just get into the 'twenties, the Whitby Esk and the Hull are not to be dismissed lightly.

After stake netting and weir coops had wiped out salmon entirely from the Esk, the run was restored by hatching out ova obtained from the Tees round about 1870. Thereafter it developed into a brilliant little river, and has kept Yorkshire in the picture for salmon, sea-trout and bull trout fishing.

The Hull is a surprise packet which we keep up our sleeves for confounding the condescending southerner to whom our abundant rain-fed river troutling is "nowt a pound". In its two main tributaries, the Driffield and Foston Becks, we have a brace of true chalk-streams that do not suffer by comparison with the best in the land.

On a county, if not on a river board basis, we claim the first mile or two of the infant Eden, which ultimately empties into the Solway, while on our northern boundary we have a half share with Durham in no less than seventy miles of the Tees. Westward we are joint owners with Westmorland in seven miles of the Lune from Gibbet Hill to the incoming Rawthay, which is Yorkshire throughout. The Weuning, another tributary with a run of salmon and sea-trout, only changes its allegiance for the last mile or two. Wholly Yorkshire, too, are those delightful Kingsdale and Dale Becks, begetters of the Greta, another tributary which is nearly so.

Though Lancashire eventually claims the Ribble, its claim is limited to

## *Yorkshire Has The Lot*

what was once known as "the Big Ribble", which extends for fifteen miles. Upstream a further forty miles is entirely Yorkshire, while the Hodder, when not serving as a boundary, is all ours.

Our enclosed waters include lakes, meres, tarns, ponds and man-made gravel pits and reservoirs. Just how many of the latter there are I am unable to say, but on the best available map I have counted over seventy, and the majority are frequented by anglers.

With an area of 473 acres Hornsea Mere is our largest natural sheet of water, and its fame as a coarse fishery goes back to earliest times. When two religious houses became rivals for the fishing rights, the issue was settled by combat.

In second place with 153 acres, and situated 1,229 feet up in Craven's limestone uplands, Malham Tarn's reputation as a big trout water is also of long standing. After fishing it in the July of 1858, Charles Kingsley described the fishing as "the best I have ever seen" and estimated that on a good day with loch flies he could kill fifty pounds.

For long years the record fly-caught trout from the tarn stood at 5 lb. 13 oz.; then in 1924 Alfred Ward, who had a catch of seven weighing 21 lb. to his credit, advanced it to 5 lb. 14 oz. Heaviest fish in the interval, one weighing 5 $\frac{3}{4}$  lb., fell to my own rod on the very last day of the 1963 season.

Semerwater, largest of our lakes, has a charming Wensleydale setting, and for many years was one of the few waters where you could catch rudd. In the 'thirties of this century a lowering of the outgoing Bain reduced its size to an estimated hundred acres.

Ponds galore are to be found in the flat Wolds country, a collection of eleven at Bransburton being popular with Hull anglers. Melton Pond, a whopper of 98 $\frac{3}{4}$  acres at Ferriby, has an outlet with the Humber, and it is the one place in Yorkshire where you can still catch that delicious and lovely little migrant the smelt.

Of inland waters frequented by anglers there still remains drains and canals only. What drains we have are situated in the East Riding, and five of the main ones are owned by the river board, and provide some fifty miles of free fishing for its licence holders.

A dozen or more canals include the three-mile-long Leven, which is said to be the country's shortest. If you are thinking of these waterways in terms of coarse fishing only, you will be well off the mark.

Driffild Canal, which is fed throughout by incoming chalk-streams, is similarly rich in food and weed growth. The top half holds brown and rainbow trout and grayling, and is being developed as a game fishery. I think it can be safely said that it is the *only* waterway where anglers are restricted to fishing with fly only.

## *Yorkshire Has The Lot*

The rural reaches of the Manchester and Huddersfield Canal are restocked regularly with brown trout, while in its Craven reaches the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, which has an amazing Mayfly hatch in a good year, receives a natural supply of incoming trout via the Gargrave feeders from Eshton Beck and Winterburn Reservoir.

These Leeds and Liverpool Canal trout are a thriving and fast-growing breed, and throw up 2-4 lb. specimens every season. In 1956 an estimated 11-pounder was killed by the propeller from a boat, and the following year Herbert Ayrton, of Barnoldswick, set up a new record with a fish of 10 lb. 11 oz. caught at the lower Gargrave feeder. This fish also ranks as the best rod-caught Yorkshire trout. Other outstanding trout from the canal include one of 8 lb. 10 oz. in 1913; a 7½-pounder to the rod of Bill Craigh in 1959, and another of 9 lb. 3 oz. taken by 15-year-old Martin Sherad, of Baildon, on live minnow in 1962.

Now valued for their trout, grayling and coarse fishing, the Ouse and its incoming rivers once had a prolific run of salmon, and are named individually in Edward I's Statute of 1283, which gave salmon a close season and protected parr from the middle of April until the Nativity of St. John the Baptist.

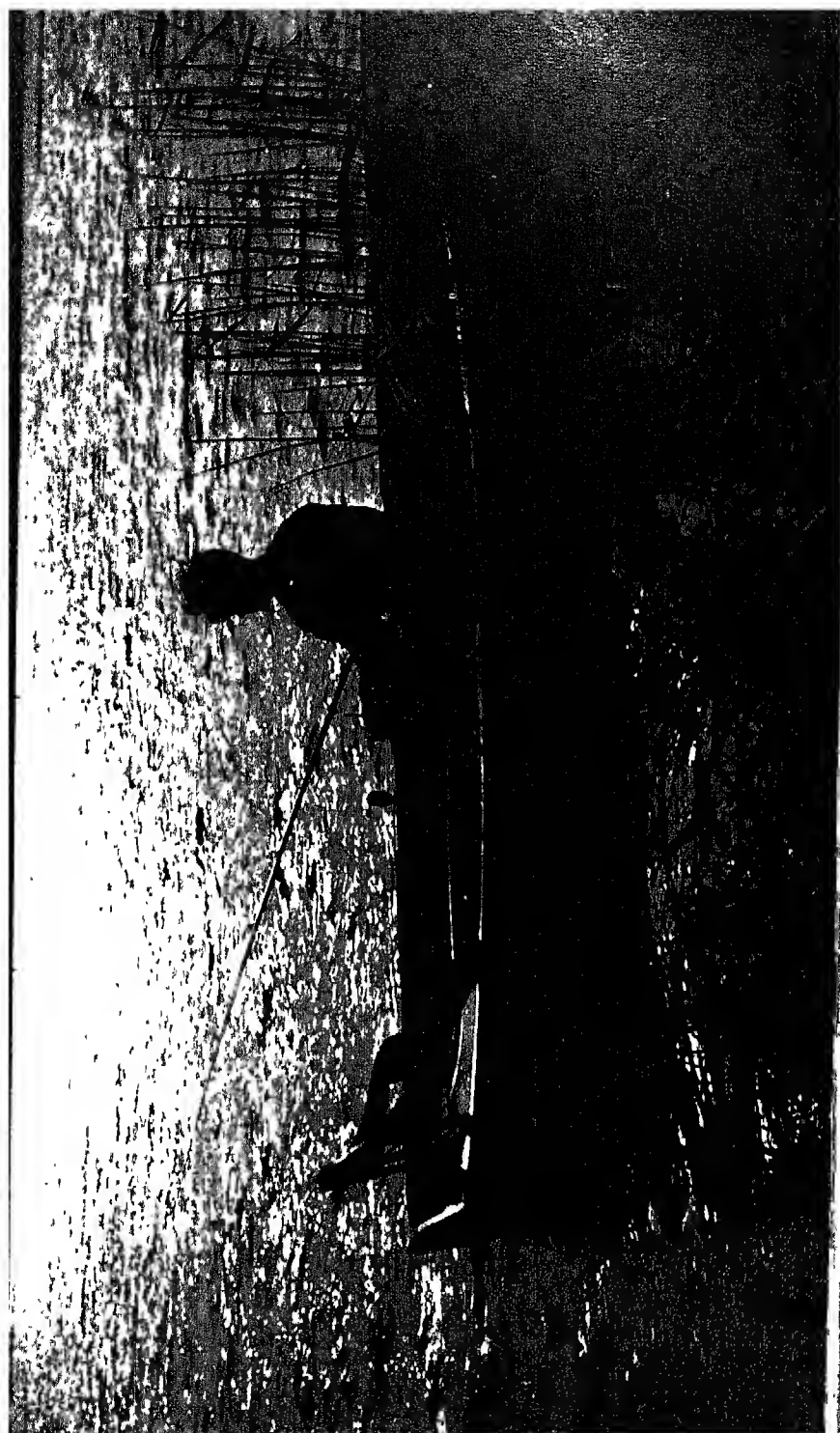
The building of obstructive weirs to provide water power worsened their lot, but it was the ever-increasing amount of pollution spewed into the Ouse by the Aire and the Don that proved too severe for the two-way runs. Last-known salmon struggled up the Aire as far as Leeds Bridge in 1884, and the final 10½-pounder was caught in the Wharfe above Tadcaster in 1939 by an angler spinning for pike. Odd fish still find their way up the Ure to spawn in Bishopdale Beck, but worth-while fishing petered out in the 1930's.

Though many, many thousands of pounds have been wasted on restockings with rainbow trout, the species has been established in the Havercrah Park Reservoirs from about the turn of the century, and in post-war years the breed has taken kindly to Driffield Beck and is now thriving and breeding.

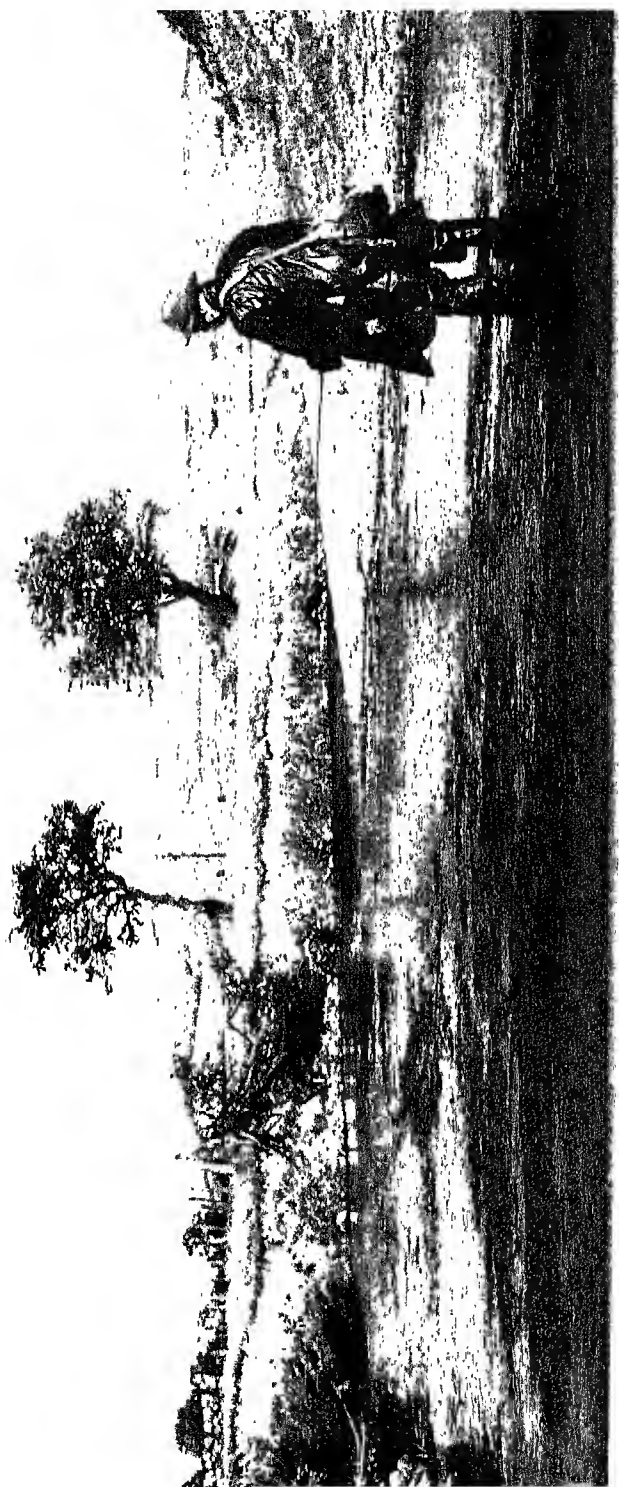
The fact that our rivers are easterly-flowing, and were once tributaries of the Great North Sea River that existed when we were still part of the Continent, ensured that grayling, barbel and burbot were natives to the county.

We like our grayling for the sport they provide to wet and dry fly in the autumn and back-end and to bait throughout the winter. When a barrier was thrown across the Nidd to bring Gouthwaite Reservoir into being, they moved in and multiplied, thus giving the lie to a belief that grayling do not like still water. "Her ladyship" is most plentiful in the Ure, and gives the best average in Driffield Beck to which, incidentally, it was introduced in the closing years of last century.

Time was when the Costa, a chalk-stream tributary of the Rye, was regarded as the finest grayling stream in the land. A too-flourishing







## *Yorkshire Has The Lot*

ranunculus growth, introduced on the advice of Dr. Tom Sanctuary, produced flooding, and the stream now stands as a monument to the spoilation that can be done in the interests of drainage.

The burbot or ell poult still has a Yorkshire footing in the Derwent and may still be in the Swale and some other of our rivers. Now that the fraternity is more law-abiding, and refrain from setting night-lines for this nocturnal feeder, there is very little evidence on which to assess its scarceness or otherwise. Going back fifty years, when Leeds anglers went weekending on the tidal reaches of the Derwent, they took scores overnight on set lines baited with lobworms. Back in the city there was then a ready market for the livers, which the herbalists rendered down to obtain a very penetrating oil much in demand by sufferers from ear-ache and deafness.

Very recently a southern angling scribe dismissed our barbel as running on the small side, but I doubt if he has ever fished for them. Our best to date, an Ouse specimen, weighed 12 lb. 1½ oz., and double-figure fish have been taken from the Derwent, Swale and Wharfe of recent seasons.

Mixed coarse fish populations in the lower reaches of our rivers include roach, dace, perch, chub, bream, pike, gudgeon and ruff. Bleak are an Ouse variety, and restocking has recently increased the number of enclosed waters where tench and carp are residents. Golden tench are present in Fawcett Reservoir, and I know a West Riding quarry hole where golden orfe thrive and breed and a mill dam where the local lads catch half-pound goldfish.

Our best chub river is undoubtedly the Swale, and a 7½-pounder caught in 1962, and another of 7 lb. 2 oz. in 1963, both to the rod of Rex Peacock, of Castleford, ranked as the best from any English water in these two seasons.

Dace are numerous in all our coarse fish river preserves, and you are most likely to take fish of specimen status from the Wharfe, Ure and Hull. A Ure fish of 1¼ lb. holds the Yorkshire record. Leeds anglers have always regarded themselves as second to none as dace fishermen, and outstandingly good in his day was Joe Pattinson, better known as "Swanky Pat". He prided himself on being "the best dace fisherman in the all of England", but dropped the claim after my old friend Harry Carr had wiped his eye to some tune in a challenge match on the lower Wharfe.

Though our waters yield specimen roach every season, the big roach glory that was Hornsea Mere's finally petered out in the early 1940's. In a class by itself for a quarter of a century, season after season it yielded more specimen roach than all the rest of the country's waters put together. One catch alone made in the July of 1920 by Mr. Herbert Field and Mr. G. W. Tether consisted of 61 roach weighing 123 lb. Wilfrid Cutting's 3 lb. 10 oz. specimen from the mere held the English record from 1917 to 1938, and is still Yorkshire's best.

## *Yorkshire Has The Lot*

Today the mere excels as a big pike and perch fishery, and post-war introduced tench look like making the top grade. Pike caught in recent seasons include a good many between 20 and 30 lb., two 30-pounders and two 31-pounders. The two latter, taken in the January and February of 1964, were both returned, and we now await the whopper that will beat the existing English record.

In 1950 John Rhodes had three Hornsea Mere perch that weighed 12 lb., his biggest being a 4½-pounder. In the same year Raymond Gibson landed 48 perch ranging in weight from 2 lb. to 4 lb. 1 oz. in two afternoons' fishing. The best of the bunch weighed 3½ lb. (twice), 3 lb. 10 oz., 3¾ lb. and 4 lb. 1 oz.

What is now likely to stand as the record haul of Yorkshire perch was made on Malham Tarn, when ten anglers fishing from four boats aggregated 857. Largest day's take there for an individual rod was set up by Mr. Bushfield, a Keighley solicitor. Altogether he landed four hundred, and of these eighty were 2 lb. and over.

Crayfish abound in the Ure and the Wharfe, and also in Malham Tarn and Semerwater. A thousand crayfish for the restocking of a Scottish lake were obtained by Jimmy Sproats Blades from the Dye Water stretches of the upper Ure in a matter of hours, and made the journey in milk cans without a single loss. Wensleydale folk now seem to have lost their taste for boiled crayfish, and the two local clubs have dropped a bylaw that restricted fishing from August 10th to Sept. 30th.

Yorkshire's fine 100 miles long coast line provides sea anglers with ample opportunity for following their sport, and the autumn festivals at Filey, Scarborough, Whitby and Bridlington come in for widespread support. In all fairness, let it be added that too much inshore trawling has affected the quality of the sport for some species.

The codling is the fish, and the best months November to February. General run is from 2-4 lb., but there is no scarcity of 5-6 pounders, and occasionally rods get cod up to 30 lb. Pouting and coalfish, better known as blegs and billet, are plentiful, and when the latter are chasing the sile up the gullies, some big catches are made on crude white-winged flies.

Mackerel invade the coast during July and August, and Filey Brig is one of the favoured spots for catching them on bait, fly and spinner. There are any amount of whiting and dabs to be caught, as are smaller haddock a mile or two offshore. Plaice are to be had at times, and flounders here and there. Tøpe are present but as yet not much fished for. Species caught only occasionally are skate, mullet, thornback ray, bass and congers.

The capture of a 560 lb. tunny about forty miles north-east of Scarborough

## *Yorkshire Has The Lot*

in 1930, led to the formation of the British Tunny Club in 1933, and Yorkshire was the first to provide big game fishing in British waters.

Of the 300 tunny caught the majority were in the 600-650 class, while the biggest, an 851-pounder taken by Mr. Mitchel-Henry, was the world record for several years. Round about 1950, due it is held to unrestricted fishing by Continental boats, sport started to peter out. When Tom Laughton and Eric Horsfall made the last trip in 1956, when they chartered a boat for a fortnight, they never saw a tunny.

It would be surprising if match fishing had not a large following in Yorkshire, for we were the originators of competitive angling for coarse fish. The earliest contests were staged by the grinders of Sheffield, and invariably the first prize was a copper kettle or a clock.

In the series of 48 National Championships, Yorkshire teams have claimed first place 19 times, Leeds having seven wins to its credit. We have also provided the Individual Champion in twenty of the series, and the late J. H. R. Bazley, who fished for Leeds, is the only angler to have ended in first place twice.

Baz was, of course, the outstanding Yorkshire angler of all times. None of a host of very fine anglers before and since has been so good in so many branches of the craft. He was a polished exponent of all styles for both game and coarse fish, and ranked as a crack amongst the match fishermen. The walls of his home and of the school where he taught were adorned with the glass-casars that had fallen to his rod. As a member of the Yorkshire Rivers Board and the National Federation, he did a great deal of administrative work, and still found time to write a great many fishing articles and several books.

Other Yorkshire angling scribes who have demanded a national as well as a local following include Jackson, Pritt and Theakstone of last century, and Walbran, Chapman, Carter Platts and Phillips of this.

While the origin of many standard wet patterns remain hidden in the mists of antiquity, our dressers must be given credit for the water-hen bloa, dark watchet, poult bloa and brown owl. Developing late as dry-fly fishermen, we adopted many existing patterns, but in Treacle Parkin, Sturdy's Fancy and John Storey we have fashioned a trio of our own that are nailers for both trout and grayling.

Longstock Angling Club had been in existence on the Test 35 years and the Ellemford Angling Club in Northumberland 5, when our oldest, the Driffild Angling Club, came into being in 1833. In the next eleven years, however, we founded a further six (Aire Fishing Club 1838, Kilnsey Angling Club 1839, Derwent Angling Club 1842, Ryedale Angling Club 1846, Otley Angling Club 1843 and the Hawes Angling Association 1844), which

## Yorkshire Has The Lot

gave us seven in all, while the score for the rest of the country still stood at two.

With the exception of the Hawes Angling Association, all these veteran clubs catered for the well-to-do angler. The Hawes Association was the first in the land to ensure fishing for the working-class fisherman, local residents paying five shillings and labourers two shillings the season. Today the locals still pay five shillings for a year's fishing, but whereas you had the run of the whole of Driffeld Beck in the olden days for ten guineas, a season fishing the top half only will now leave you £100 the poorer.



*A freshwater bouillabaisse  
Includes dace.  
Even if you can't spell it  
You can smell it.*

*People who find eels repulsive are not much impressed by vivid accounts of how they spawn way out in the deeps of the Sargasso Sea and travel across the ocean as tiny elvers and ascend our rivers and drains and ditches and grow to maturity in fresh water, and then, on feeling that old mating urge, move down to sea again and finally spawn and die where they began. If people don't like eels it's no use telling them that their life-cycle is more or less the salmon's in reverse, and very wonderful indeed. You might as well save your natural history and send out for a bob's worth of fried skate.*

TROUBLED WATERS, by Maurice Wiggin

*At the head of my list of fishing fallacies I unhesitatingly place the dry-fly myth.*

RIVERSIDE REFLECTIONS, by C. F. Walker

*The Ceiriog is about the most perfect trout stream I have ever fished, and around Tregeirlog you can meet with all and every type of water, from the dead long still pool to the sparkling ripple that finishes in a miniature whirlpool under some overhanging roots of an ancient tree. Other places, the best of all, are almost covered from bank to bank with overhanging branches, where it takes a real expert to get the fly on the water at all. Here indeed the old saying "Patience and Perseverance conquereth all things" holds truth in its hands, as sometimes one has to bend and squirm and almost crawl up to the centre of the river to get a cast in at a required point. But the game is well worth the candle, as I have found that Ceiriog trout, size for size, fight harder than any trout I have caught elsewhere, and a one-pound fish on fine gut will give one as much or more fun than a three- or four-pounder from some easier water.*

FISHING FANTASY, by J. Hughes-Parry

W. J. PEZARE

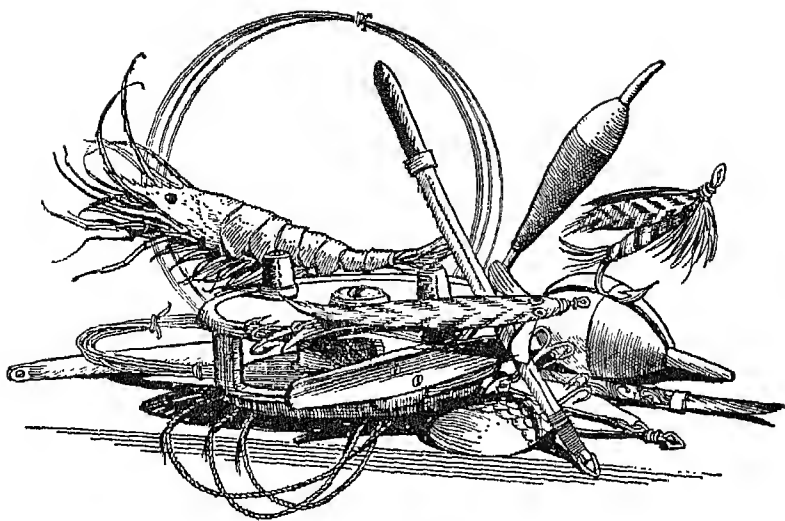
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*Fishing with Sam*

WALTER JOHN PEZARE, in his early fifties, is a top-flight graphic artist in Government service. But he was not always so technical. Has exhibited at the Royal Academy and for his own pleasure paints land- and seascapes. Was Principal of Worcester Art School while in his twenties. Served in the R.A.F. during the war. Has had illustrations published in *The Sunday Times* and the London *Evening Standard* and illustrated several books.



## *Fishing with Sam*

W. J. PEZARE

A LOT OF people know or know of my old friend Maurice, writer, critic, journalist, scholar, angler and motor-maniac. Rather fewer know Sam, a sort of madman from the Black Country. Sam, although few are aware of it, is Maurice's middle name. Sam is also Maurice's *alter ego*. Maurice is the public *persona*, Sam is the private person. To get to know Sam you have to suffer with Sam.

I have suffered with Sam.

We met in 1940, brought together by our country's dire need. How dire it was may be judged from the fact that They in their wisdom took me from my innocent headmastership of an art school, and Sam from his scarcely less innocent editing of a paper, and imperatively demanded that we should both become aircraft fitters in the shortest possible time. Being naturally gifted with my hands, I became a quite adequate fitter in short order. But being also a modest and retiring character, I never rose above the rank of L.A.C. during my whole laborious and painful years in the R.A.F. Sam is pretty hopeless with his hands and never made much of a fitter. But being gifted with the power to make friends and influence people, a natural persuader richly endowed with eloquence, he became a Sergeant almost as soon as the ink was dry on his oath. Need I say more?

This, then, was the persuasive party who introduced me to fishing. The



## *Fishing With Sam*

Petrine clement in his complicated psyche rejoices in making converts. One of the interesting things about being Sam's friend is that you never know, on approaching that hospitable door, what raving enthusiasm will have him in its grip. All you know is that you will be sharing it before nightfall. . . . I never had the slightest intention of becoming an angler, but within a few weeks of demobilisation I found myself hopelessly involved in Sam's involvement. He likes company, and is a natural proselytiser. I sometimes think the only reason he has never sold Blackpool Tower to General de Gaulle, taking the Eiffel Tower in part exchange, is that the idea hasn't occurred to him yet.

Together we have fished the Severn, the Thames, the Teme, the Wey, the Mole, the sea at many points, and Farlow's Lakes at Iver, Bucks. It was at this latter haunt that I was introduced to fried roach as a breakfast dish. I am very fond of fish in almost all its forms, but this was a test of my enthusiasm. However, this was also one of the most delightful summer rendezvous imaginable.

*Fish in the unruffled lakes  
Their swarming colours wear . . .*

Sam recited that poem of Auden's about fifteen times, as we crouched immobile as Indians at the water's edge. Auden was a passion with him, too. I came to know it off by heart.

*Fish in the unruffled lakes  
Their swarming colours wear,  
Swans in the winter air  
A white perfection have,  
And the great lion walks  
Through his innocent grove.  
Lion, fish and swan  
Act, and are gone  
Upon Time's toppling wave . . .*

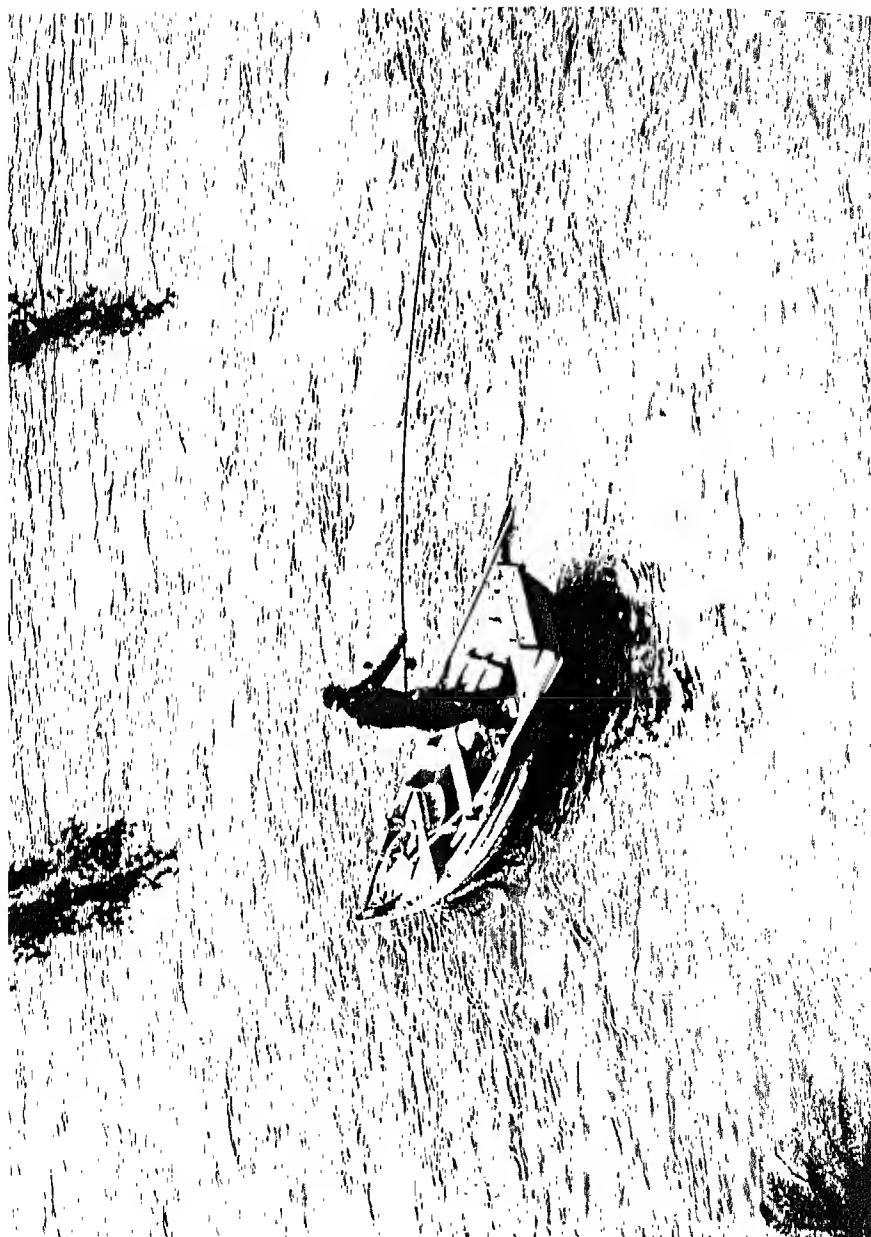
Time's toppling wave washed us up on the shores of a quiet estuary one morning about dawn. The first exquisite and exhilarating signs of dawn had trembled in the sky as we drove down through the rose-embowered hamlets of the South Country. Coming home to my homeland I rejoiced in the signs of summer.

We unpacked our gear from the boot of the car and staggered down to the tideline. This was an estuary by courtesy only. What flowed down the channel was not a river but a tiny thread of pure water, barely a brook. But the tide when it flowed into this almost landlocked bay made a channel almost a mile wide at the widest, and nowhere much less than half a mile. It



*Top rod. Just about the summit of human felicity to the dedicated salmon fly-fisher. The River Oykel in Sutherland, part of the celebrated Balnagown Estate, is not only wild and wonderful; it can also cost more than £100 per week per rod*

OBLIVIOUS  
*A salmon fly-fisher  
fishes out his cast on  
the Glenmayne Pool  
of the River Tweed  
near Galashiels,  
Selkirk*



## *Fishing with Sam*

is now a cherished resort of sailors, but in those halcyon days there were few of that sort about, and the fisherman could enjoy his freedom in a little boat.

Our dinghy was on the tideline, but the sea was out. This was as we had calculated it would be. We stowed our stuff away, drew on our thighboots, and trudged down to the thin thread of fresh water. For we had to dig our bait before the tide turning filled the channel and covered the beds of thick black clay, laced with flints, where alone ragworms lived in palpitating close communities. Next-to-useless lugworms could be had here there and almost everywhere, but the raggeries, as we called them, were few and far between, their whereabouts a "secret" shared only by a few dozen local and travelling fishermen. The ragworm could only be got at in the hour or so of dead low water: at other times their communities were under the sea.

We lined ourselves up with various landmarks which Sam, with his love of romantic conspiratorial stuff, fondly believed were his secret and his alone; a heronry, a blasted oak, a white house that shone like a jewel on the gentle bank of green. Satisfied that he had pinpointed the location (as indeed he *had*) he set me digging. With the garden fork which we carried I heaved up lumps of black clay each about a cubic foot and weighing far more than was good for me, while Sam, bent double, tore each lump apart with his hands in search of the worms. We took it in turns—a few minutes of that sort of digging was quite enough. Strange how agile the rags are: they vanish in a flash unless you get your fingers on them. The clay being laced with razor-sharp flints, it was only a matter of minutes before the catcher was a sorry sight, black to the elbows with glutinous mud, streaked with his own blood. But enthusiasm never flagged.

We had an hour at the most before the swelling tide began to widen and deepen the tiny fresh-water rillet beyond the point at which we could cross it on our return to the home shore where the dinghy lay. Often we would stagger back with the tide strongly lapping the tops of our thighboots. Sometimes, then, we would take a Guinness at the lonely pub on the rotting quay, and that was very fine. But of course on these dawn patrols the pub was still asleep when we returned, and we liked the dawn outings because they gave us the longest day possible before we had to hare back to our evening's work, fifty miles away. Anyway, when the pub was closed we took a swig of something which we carried.

Washed and refreshed, we now dragged the dinghy down to the water's edge and went afloat on the making tide. It was ever a laborious row down the channel, but sometimes we were cheered right away by the signs of bass or mullet, or both, streaking in from sea, so high in the water that their dorsals cut the surface. We anchored at a buoy down channel, opposite a jutting point of grassy sand where Sam had once caught a three-pound bass

## *Fishing with Sam*

on his first cast, and which forever more he regarded as the spot of spots. Since the rowing generally fell to me, I was never too sorry to receive the command to easy-all. Sam then threw out the hook or, which he actually preferred, tied up to the buoy, thus breaking several immemorial laws; and so we fell a-fishing.

I will say this for my old friend: though a quicksilver sort of chap in the ordinary way, interested in everything to the point at which he appeared to stay with nothing very long, when fishing his concentration and patience seemed inexhaustible. How is it that a man so impatient and jumpy in the ordinary way should discover reserves of statuesque immobility when fishing, and only when fishing? It has always puzzled me. But although I never quite shared this absorption, I perceived that the mystery of the line entering the opaque water was a mystery of a high and possessing order, for him as for other devoted anglers. The recuperative and therapeutic effect of this absorption I can understand: in its very intensity, its silent grip, this passionate pursuit washes away the cares of the world most thoroughly.

We never caught mullet. We caught school bass, flounders, eels in season and invariably a great many inedible green crabs. Once we saw a smallish tope but Sam would not let us even try to catch it. I wondered why. He said it was near enough a mammal and he did not hunt mammals. What he meant, I think, was that the tope is viviparous. As an ethical argument it was as dicey and confused as most. Anyway, we let the tope swim away unharmed. Incidentally we caught no more small fish after it had appeared.

From time to time we would up-hook and potter about a bit, trying new locations. The fishing was fair, sometimes better than fair, and usually when the time came to sweat back against the ebbing tide to the hard, we had a nice basket of fish to fry. Flounders have a rich and subtle flavour, stronger than plaice and soles; bass are as delicious and delicate as sea-trout. Being more fish fancier than fisherman, I enjoyed these sea fishing trips best.

Of course the little estuary wasn't really the sea; it was just sea water, landlocked. Sometimes we would really put to sea and spend a day heaving on the ocean, fishing for mackerel, bass, pollack, wrasse, bream, soles, plaice, skate or conger. There is nothing more sickening than being anchored in a dinghy in a chop or swell. But so long as we kept on the move it was fine. Sam had great stores of verse—at one time he knew by heart everything that Auden had written—and when he stopped reciting I knew that he was feeling sick. But strangely the factor of sickness merely seemed to point up the other-world feeling of a day out beyond the south or western coasts. It was a sort of admission fee, a token payment made for the privilege of being private and footloose on the ocean. It was well worth paying, and not begrudged.

## *Fishing with Sam*

Rock fishing appealed to us strongly. It was mainly a question of so organising our lives that we could get out to some remote unpeopled headland where few or none invaded the loneliness. Once there, we had our best times of all. We used a ten-foot sea-trout fly rod and a ten-foot salmon spinning rod, each with a centre-pin reel and float tackle. It was the most thrilling fishing of all, when the bass came nosing around the slippery spray-wet rocks. There was a divine simplicity about it which appealed strongly to both of us. But, of course, like many other simplicities, it was difficult to organise. If you want both lives—the well-rewarded civilised occupations of cities, *and* the stark simplicities of the remote places—then you have to work and organise quite hard. You can have one or the other without much trouble; both, is a problem. We solved it when we could, and whenever we did we wondered why we were such idiots as to go back to the complexity of the city? But what can you do? In Noel Coward's famous phrase, "Grab every scrap of happiness, grab it while you can". On that excellent maxim we operated as often as we remembered.

This dreamy yet tremendously thrilling float fishing from the slippery, weed-dressed, spray-dashed rocks, and the tranquil little expeditions in a little boat—these were the highlights of the sea fishing with Sam. We both saw no joy in beach casting with vast poles of rods, and as for dangling something obscene from the congested walk of a pier, it never had the least appeal. One other aspect of sea fishing which we loved, in due season and when we could get it, was fishing from a breakwater when the mackerel were inshore—from such a little harbour as that of Mevagissey, when the rubby-dubby slick was strong on the water after the pilchard boats came in, and sometimes late into the night we could take them in heartening numbers, beautiful big delicious fish, flinging the float out with a fixed-spool reel and supple rod from the extremity of the sea wall where the tide rushed swirling into the tiny sequestered port. With the sea birds wheeling and crying, the lights going on along the wrinkled coast, and the sea breeze shifting with the flowing tides.

Just across the English Channel, where the Sussex-Hampshire-Dorset littoral is repeated almost without change in Normandy, Sam and I got and ate mackerel which we shall always remember, mackerel of an unbelievable freshness and delicacy of flavour. Yet were they, *really*, so very different from the mackerel of Mevagissey? I wouldn't like to swear. Association is a potent factor which affects remembrance as it affects judgment. Sailing across the Channel into the tricky harbour of Ouistreham, and up through the lock into the eel-infested haven of the Orne canal—that is the sort of experience which subtly alters the flavour of any fish, and the tang of any memory. . . .

I suppose there are few pleasanter experiences than to meet nightfall in a

## Fishing with Sam

small craft come to haven, with the riding lights cheery and gleaming on tranquil water, and a light breeze flickering after a broiling day. . . . The world of the land adjacent and accessible, yet the world of the water omnipresent too. Sitting on deck with something savoury sizzling over the stove, a bottle broached, and the bunks snug and inviting, and all safe and sound after some small trials. . . . Is there a moment to beat it? Then you forget squalls and the searching wetness of the stormy sea, forget rasped skin, strained tendons, hunger and desolation. You feel life cannot be long enough to prolong the magic moment.

I don't know if it is breaking some sort of conspiratorial silence, but I'd like to record that we used sometimes to go *spinning* for trout. As I understand it, this is held by some to be a disgraceful thing to do, though for the life of me I don't see why. Real crafty light spinning seems to me just as artistic and beguiling as fishing the fly, and I'm blowed if I can see how it is inferior to fishing, say, the wet fly downstream in the good old way, with something like a Butcher on the point. Sam used to be troubled in his conscience when we went spinning for trout—though, since he spent many hours enthusiastically spinning for perch, I never quite cottoned on to what seemed to my unsophisticated mind a theological hair-splitting worthy of the medieval scholiasts. Anyway, spin we did, on the Teme, on the Taw and Torridge, and on various wild little streams of the Welsh border, where Sam became a different person, sloughing away the *persona* of a London editor and emerging, as from a chrysalis, in the brilliant, gay and carefree integument of his native gypsy self. The March of Wales always seemed to have this liberating effect. Indeed it is a region rich and rare, among the wildest and loveliest in Britain; I was happy there, too, whether drinking border beer and eating fried rashers cut from flitches hung in the smoky chimneys of tiny hill taverns tucked away above flood level, or slipping and scrambling along tortuous swift brooks in search of small sweet trout.

Sam's troubled conscience—the simple fact, he had read too many books written by goddam purists whose joylessness extends to carping at everyone else's pleasures—his conscience, I say, he eased by a characteristic expedient. He would make me fish the fly for the first two hours, while he fished the spinner, "getting", as he said, "the poison out" of his system. Then we would swap rods and for the rest of the day he would religiously fish the fly while I spun, or span, or whatever it is. I must say he was a dexterous performer in either mode: the one thing in the manual line which he is really neat at is presenting a lure to an invisible fish. Sam fished tiny Devons, quill minnows or phantoms, and he fished them more slowly than I would have believed possible. He could make the light lures dance and flutter in the water around the pockets of relative calm around rocks and stones. As often

## *Fishing with Sam*

as not he cast upstream, for, as he pontifically pointed out, fish can't see what's creeping up behind 'em.

Yet despite the soundness of that argument, I'm inclined to think that his chiefest joy was to fish the wet fly across and downstream on a stream of fair width and rapid flow. There is something basic, fundamental and antique about this ancient practice which appealed deeply to the old atavist, who is no more consistent than the next man. For this exercise, which I think he loved as much as anything in angling, he used an old greenheart rod made by Anderson of Dunkeld. It felt pretty heavy in the hand, but as Sam always said, it's the action that tires you, not the avoirdupois, and certainly in action it was very sweet and limber and casting no effort at all. With a team of sparsely-tied hackle spiders he would go drifting down the stream, wading as deep as he could just for the joy of feeling the cold purling press of mountain-born water against his legs, and taking always a decent basket of small, sweet trout.

Yet somehow the mind goes back persistently to long spells sitting on the bank watching a float, catching next to nothing, calm and contented, resting the low fever of London out of our systems. Sam never took coarse fishing seriously, I'm afraid—though he enjoyed it deeply. There was this streak in him, you see; a touch of the old ethics, I'm afraid, which tended to complicate his pleasures. Unless there was some arguably rational object to the exercise, he couldn't quite let himself go and enjoy doing something "useless". If there were food fish to be caught, he was one hundred per cent relaxed and keen. If it was non-food fish, coarse fish that no-one wanted, he didn't really believe in catching them; and, therefore, caught few.

However, this didn't seriously affect our contentment, sitting there on baskets, with the roach pole or Avon-style or match rod in its rest. Almost always in the rest. As food-fish hunters we were restless, assiduous and feral; after the coarse fish, we never tried very hard. And somehow, I don't quite know how, these half-hearted expeditions were wonderfully soothing. By Sam's imperious edict we were only allowed to keep perch, pike, and eels, all of which we enjoyed eating—though sometimes when things were rough we would keep dace, too, and Sam would brew up one of his celebrated freshwater bouillabaissees, God forbid. We lived simply yet somehow lavishly on these expeditions, carrying whackings and lashings of fairly primitive food, such as bread and bacon, bangers and onions and cheese, and always an old soldier's stove to brew quarts of tea. And old Sam, free from the tensions of his high-pressure executive routine, would grow visibly darker and leaner as the day drowsed by, and by nightfall he would have sloughed off completely the nervous twitch of his profession, and be assimilated back into the feral world of his wandering forbears.



## Fishing with Sam

On these placid expeditions I learned to love the roach pole. There is something deeply satisfying about this ancient instrument. Eschewing all gadgetry and gimmickry, it reduces you—or elevates you—to the lost status of a boy, innocently and impecuniously fishing his native waters with the irreducible minimum of gear. I think I can understand the enthusiasm of the aficionado who surrounds himself, as Sam certainly did, with all the available paraphernalia; yet, at bottom, fishing is a simple and primitive pursuit, and there is something fitting in going after your simple prey with the simplest equipment. At least I found it so.

It's getting on for twenty years now, since, freshly released from our proud servitude, Sam and I began to visit the waters that had been left in peace for so long. The enthusiasm has waxed and waned, but the lure of the water and its mysterious inhabitants is always lurking there in a backwater of consciousness. Now the talk is all of a boat that shall take us across again to Ouistreham, or even down to the Med. Since the last time we were out together Sam's enthusiastic navigation nearly got us into St. Alban's Race, I must say I have certain reservations. But I know how it will turn out. Already I can hear that imperative sergeant-voice baying peremptory orders, can smell mackerel frying in the galley and tart wine spilt on the holystoned planks of the tiny deck, and the fragrance of morning stealing up across the sea. And I see in the mind's eye the lean brown face of my friend as he sits with the tiller in the crook of his arm, crooning the songs of the sea.

So shall it be.



*It is a question what you should drink, afloat, to give you most lasting joy. You will be thirsty, not a doubt of it, but you cannot frequently pump ship when you are within sight of shore and under the scrutiny of its denizens, especially if they be ladies prone to borrow glasses. Thus though beer is above all an excellent, nourishing and sustaining drink, yet whiskey and wine, rum and brandy, gin and Calvados may be more prudent; unless it is a scorching sun and an unquiet sea, which is a combination devoutly to be feared, but met with oftener than seems right. Withal, no boat should put to sea without sweet tea or black coffee, and a supply of bacon sandwiches, which are strong in comfort, and cold beef, and pasties, and cold boiled potatoes, and a flask of onion soup.*

TROUBLED WATERS, by Maurice Wiggin

JACK THORNDIKE

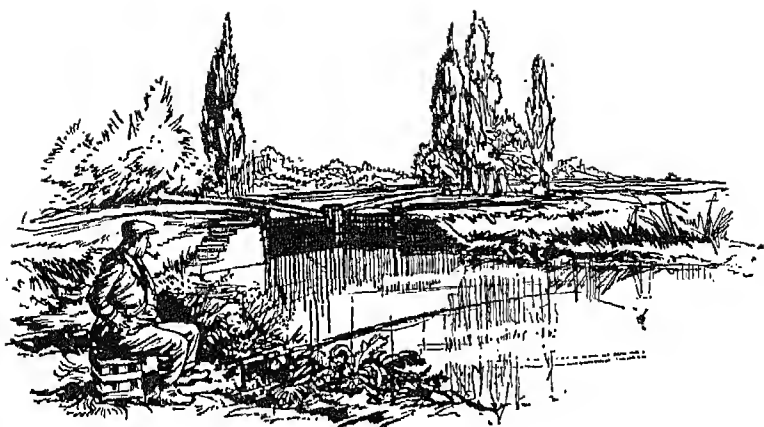
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*The Editor Regrets . . .*

JACK THORNDIKE has been in journalism all his working life, apart from war-time service with the R.A.F. He has been editor of *Angling Times* since 1956 and a director since 1963. He joined the paper as features editor six months after it was founded. Is also editor of *Fishing*, a weekly magazine from the same house. Has been an angler since boyhood but claims that he is about average. Likes to fish the fly for trout and bait for the quality coarse fish of the Broads rivers.



## *The Editor Regrets . . .*

JACK THORNDIKE

RICHARD is a close collaborator of mine, helpful and wise—and often quite rude. What's more he must be a friend unknown to the Postmaster General.

I have the interesting if unrelenting job of editing an angling newspaper and hardly a day passes without my thoughts of deciding what to publish and what to leave out being disturbed by the impatient ringing of the telephone. A voice, so unlike its owner, greets me with the ungentlemanly "Wotcher cock". It's Richard.

I have just time to return the greeting with "What, you again?" when the one-sided conversation gets under way, something like this:

"That was a lot of codswallop you published about the fellow who caught a 2 lb. roach from the so-and-so river. There aren't any roach in there. I should know, I've fished it for years."

When I try to assure him it was a genuine catch I am, as always, rudely prevented from continuing by the voice, now in a different dialect, exclaiming "Did you see the fish?"

I haven't had the opportunity of replying when I am told "Of course you didn't, you just took the chap's word." When I endeavour to strengthen my case for using the story by confirming that the capture was witnessed by two other anglers who saw it weighed, I achieve precisely nothing, for Richard is now giving me chapter and verse on why he knows the fish must have been a chub.

## *The Editor Regrets . . .*

I have said little, but am too exhausted to continue the discussion. It is just as well, for by this time Richard has switched the conversation to some "clot who doesn't know what he's writing about".

The prolonged and almost daily telephone discussion on such subjects as what we should do with pike, why we should not nationalise waters, and the load of nonsense I allow to be published about the balance of nature, frequently ends with the voice of Richard, suddenly changing from the dialect of a Liverpudlian to that of a former university scholar, telling me that I am not such a bad chap after all. Politely, appealingly, he asks "And now, I wonder if you can do something for me?"

Usually I oblige, not only to escape his tongue if I refuse, but to enable me to put down the telephone and continue the more urgent job of keeping hungry sub-editors abreast of a strict time-table.

And that's difficult enough without Richard, for anglers are prolific letter-writers and every day brings a mail of many views, of queries, of what we should do and what we should not do if we want to retain "their" interest. Many don't mince their words, and we are left thinking that not all anglers are quite the benevolent, beer-drinking, friendly characters many fiction writers would have us believe.

"There's too much news from the south," writes a northern angler. "There's not enough in your paper about the north," claims a reader from Preston. And a cry from a midlander to give him more news of his own area. "Let's have more sea-fishing features," writes a salt water man from Deal. "There's too much about sea-fishing," claims a coarse fisherman from Rotherham.

"Walker's talking nonsense again," says a veteran, proudly claiming that he has been fishing for years before our columnist was born. "I have fished better and better ever since I started to read Walker," is the belief of a twenty-year-old from Staines, who adds, "Let's have more of his sound advice."

And so it goes on. Writes a serviceman: "I am shortly being posted abroad. Can you tell me the best methods for fishing the Red Sea?" Surprisingly enough, we can, and do.

And then on an overcrowded postcard comes a plea from a titled gent who, after informing us he eats practically all coarse fish, asks: "Am I full of gut disorder and internal tapes in consequence?" He tells us his fish are thoroughly cooked before eating, so we are able to re-assure him that he may have a long and active life.

As we continue to wade through our mountainous mail the telephone bell rings again with the urgency I always associate with Richard at the other end. I'm right.

"I forgot to tell you earlier. It's not otters killing the fish down on the

## *The Editor Regrets . . .*

Hampshire rivers. It's the mink. I know. I've seen them." After the shortest call on record we get back to the letters.

After spiking one or two and so avoiding the libel actions that would follow if they were to be published, we find a newcomer to angling who wants to know: "Where I can go on the afternoon of 16th June and be sure of catching a tench." He little knows that if we knew we would be there ourselves.

If some of our readers had their way we would never get any pictures of fish. Righteously they point out that such-and-such a catch should have been returned to the water and not photographed on the bank and, as they put it, left to die. Yet if we *don't* publish a picture as proof of the catch, they don't believe the fish were ever caught.

For the record, it takes an expert angling photographer only seconds to *carefully* place a netful of fish on to a wet grassy bank, get his picture, and see all the fish swim happily away as they go back into the water. We write and tell them this, but many stalwart box-camera performers remain stubborn disbelievers.

And when the day's mail has been gone through, and we return to the more pressing job of producing a newspaper, we discover that letter-writers have a by-product. When they put down their ball-point pens, they carefully reshape them and post them to us in the form of fishing tackle. Over the years hundreds of varieties of bite indicators and floats, all fashioned from long and short, fat and thin ball-point pen holders, have reached us; many accompanied by intricate drawings and lengthy articles. It would seem to them that the whole technique and mastery of angling depended on the possession of some quaintly-shaped ball-point pen, which will tell them when they have a bite as no expensively manufactured article will ever do.

Maybe they are right, but we are not so ingeniously minded and often make do with no float at all; just a piece of dough on the line.

Nevertheless we bless them all for their ingenuity and often wish we had their talent for the clever manipulation, not only of ball-point pen holders, but old spoons and odd pieces of metal which their deft fingers and patient minds fashion into irresistible pike- and salmon-killing plugs and spinners.

We have finally dealt with the mail when an excited and somewhat perturbed voice tells us over the telephone that he is someone of importance in the Post Office sorting office and wants to know what we intend to do about a stinking parcel which they flatly refuse to deliver. This has happened to us before, so we know some angler somewhere has caught what he *thinks* to be a record gudgeon, and he wants us to confirm the species and weight.

A junior member of the staff, possessing a strong stomach (or so we hope), is hurried off to the post office to make our apologies to the sorters, and

## *The Editor Regrets . . .*

returns with the parcel. All those with less strong constitutions stand clear while the package is opened to reveal what was obviously once a fish, but is now a foul-smelling sample of decomposition, bearing no resemblance to any particular species.

Junior of the strong stomach, with the parcel at arm's length, hurries away to deposit it in the furnace. The office is sprayed with a disinfectant kept for the purpose, and I sit down and compose a letter of condolence to the captor, kindly pointing out that should he ever seek our advice in this way again there is a prescribed solution of formalin which will preserve his fish.

I often wonder what must be the fate of some of the angling fraternity who order dead bait by post, especially in summer or when the mail is delayed. One reader who asked for a supply of livebait through the mail found on receipt an empty plastic bag, dripping with water. Perhaps the postman was an angler?

As an angling newspaper we depend very largely on what the postman brings in the way of news, features, photographs, and readers' letters, but some of us who occasionally find time to go fishing, also await his prompt delivery of the familiar old biscuit tin supply of maggots.

It was the arrival of one such consignment which taught us all a lesson. On receipt the bait was duly inspected and approved, but as those who were to share it did not need it until the following day, it was agreed to leave the tin, with its sawdust-covered wriggling contents, in the office overnight. That particular office was at the top of a three-storey building—as we were rudely reminded on arriving for work next morning.

Some member of the staff, assessing the merits of the bait the night before, had failed to secure the biscuit-tin lid and the majority of the moving mass of maggots had made their escape.

Now we know something about the behaviour of maggots on a hook and have even gambled on a maggot race across the office floor, but never did we know until then of the speed at which solitary maggots can travel or the hole-and-corner antics of which they are capable.

A cleaner's notice on the office door announcing in no uncertain terms that she refused to do her morning chores was warning enough of what had happened. Maggots were everywhere. In the black of night they had wriggled their way from the tin to every conceivable part of the office floor. They had sped into every corner, every cupboard, under the office door and down the banister rails and stairs, under the linoleum and through the floor.

They were found in the reporters' room on the floor below and had dropped through the ceiling on to the general manager's desk. How fortunate for us that he is an angler.

The job of sweeping up was ours alone, for we knew from "views" rather

## *The Editor Regrets . . .*

vehemently expressed we were far from popular with the non-angling section of the office staff. A morning's editorial work was lost while we retrieved the mass of escaped maggots, but it was some days afterwards before we ceased to be informed of the odd one that had been seen making its way into or out of some desk drawer or cupboard.

As I said earlier, anglers are prolific writers and it is from some of their letters that we get good news stories, but when it comes to legibility or a coherent description of what happened when the "catch of a lifetime" was made, we are bound to believe the letter was written on the bank immediately after the fish had been caught, with the angler's hands trembling with excitement.

Some of these letters are a sub-editor's nightmare, but being anglers themselves, they plod on, knowing something of the joy the writer must have experienced. They try to decipher the writings of an excited fisherman doing his best to convince us that his catch is worthy of one of our prize rods. But in the rush to get the story in that week's issue something sometimes goes wrong and it's in print before we can do anything about it. You may have seen the 1 lb. dace that was printed as 11 lb. or the 2 lb. roach that was reported weighing 22 lb. In the odd instance we have even carried a big fish capture story without ever actually giving the weight of the fish. In that case excitement must have overcome the sub-editor.

But not all stories which reach type stage make our printed news pages, and this is where the sub-editor more than makes amends for the odd literal that escapes him.

I recall two stories which had actually got into a page but which were spotted on a proof before being sent to the printer. This is how the first one read on the proof:

"... and long-term work would be required, as no more than ten per cent of the 600 workers were giving really satisfactory effluents."

The second was a report on more bank space for freelance anglers on the River Welland and it read: "Match anglers are able to use a rod running the whole length of the river."

I sometimes wonder if the printing of such "errors" might not help to put a little spice into our mixture of news and features. But, as always, I have second thoughts, because I know that if I deliberately let a little unconscious humour get by, the next day's mail will bring an avalanche of letters from that section of our readership always anxious to point out the error of our ways and to inform us how the stories *should* have read.

But, bless their hearts, they are not only prolific letter writers; they are avid readers. Without them, where would we be?\*

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\* Down the mines or working as television critics—or, possibly, manufacturing lawn-mowers.—Editor.





A. G. CUMPER

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*Unorthodox Angling*

A. G. CUMPER, known far-and-wide as Bill, is an electrical engineer of considerable resourcefulness, who built his own television receiver at a time when most people had hardly heard of "the box". Runs a business in rustic Surrey and fishes for everything from gudgeon to salmon—including hilarious sessions after the bass in his Bermudan sloop, which he sails with zest.



## Unorthodox Angling

A. G. "BILL" CUMPER

I DON'T KNOW that I really *mean* unorthodox—there are no ways of fishing that haven't been explored, and nothing new under the sun. But the experts do so like writing dogmatic little books—do it this way, do it that way—there's no end of them—and I don't really cotton on to that. I've always liked to experiment. Ever since I can remember I have.

I was lucky to be brought up on the Tweed. My uncle and cousins, all very keen fishermen, saw to it that a rod was put in my hand at a very early age. One of the things that struck me early on was the fact that my uncle told me one day, "Bill, you spend far too much time in one place, my lad. Have a cast here and a cast there, wherever you think a fish may lie. But *cover the water.*" I've been a wandering angler ever since. It pays.

In the Tillingbourne, near where I live, there is a lovely little run that goes under both the road and railway bridges. Walking cautiously down there, you could see trout of a pound and above—in water nowhere more than seven or eight inches deep. I puzzled about catching these fellows for a long, long time. It was just a "watercress" stream, no more than a couple of yards wide, and shallow and gin-clear everywhere.

I wondered—how could I get a worm down to these big chaps? I surveyed the problem and decided the only possible way of catching those

## *Unorthodox Angling*

chaps was to get a worm fifty yards below the spot where one was standing. Fifty yards! I got a small bough of a tree, a big twig really, laid my hook and worm over it, and allowed the current to carry it down as I paid out line. Sure enough, when I held the rod up, the hook and worm fell off the branch into the water. Then I reeled slowly in until my worm was travelling upstream at about two knots. The trout weighed 1 lb. 1 oz. Should I ever forget it? I was seven.

I adopted the same tactics again, and in all I had twelve fish by the floating twig method. That upstream travel of a big worm must have looked darned unrealistic. Against all the pundits. But it caught the fish.

I was mystified by this success: it seemed just stupid. I got a pal to fish the method while I climbed a tree and watched. As soon as the worm began its unrealistic swim upstream, the trout began to take notice. First a tiny trout, then a bigger brother, finally a real big 'un—wham!

These days, of course, I never bother with the humble old worm. Well, not often. But if you do, remember that a worm travelling upstream at two to three knots exerts an irresistible fascination on wary trout.

Never mind what the books say. . . .

I think I can say that my only claim to angling fame is that I was one of the very first anglers to fish with the "tube" fly, made from a grey squirrel's tail. Any fool can copy my method of construction, but I think it was my invention. This is how it evolved.

I was out on a lake with an old friend: not a touch all morning. One last drift. . . . Then I showed my companion the lure which I had concocted. Half-an-inch of electrical insulation conduit, a wisp of squirrel tail hair and a rooster hackle, roughly tied in with five-amp fuse wire.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "You're not going to use that bloody thing? It's a monstrosity."

"Why not?" I replied. "We haven't done all that well with the orthodox rubbish, have we?"

The cogency of this down-to-earth argument quelled his scepticism. "All right", he said grudgingly, "give it a try."

I threaded my cast through the flex, tied on a small treble. He rowed up the lake, as fast as he could, and I began to cast. Second cast, a beautiful rainbow, 2 lbs.

We took our limit of six fish, every one of them taken on the squirrel monstrosity just as it entered the wake of the boat, having been cast out at an angle of about ninety degrees.

By orthodox methods we took nothing, nett.

About boat fishing—I've discovered that I could have success by varying the methods advocated by the experts. I don't nowadays cast in front of the

## *Unorthodox Angling*

boat during the drift. Forward of the bow, or forward of the stern, and allow the boat's drift to drag the cast round. By the time the boat's speed starts to act on the fly it has reached a decent depth. The taking position, I've found, is about thirty degrees direct behind the boat. It always pays.

All the experts say that when you are fishing from a boat, the flasher flies should be fished fast. I have found that it pays me better to use another method. I cast out and put the rod down! This I do whether I am using my monstrosity, the squirrel-tail fly, or ordinary flashers, or indeed any sort of sunk fly. I don't grease the line. I let the lot sink and light a pipe—I reckon I wait as much as three or four minutes before I pick up the rod again. Then you just twiddle the line in, at the rate of an inch or two per second—no more. You'll be surprised how often you get a fish on.

Times are when nothing seems to work. You spend the whole morning fishing every way you've ever heard of—orthodox and even unorthodox. Come luncheon time, you might as well anchor up. But before you start in in your grub, make a pellet of bread out of one of your sandwiches and impale it on your fly. Cast out gently and let it sink. Nine times out of ten nothing happens to it on the way down, or while it's lying on the bottom—but if, when you're ready, you just twitch it back to you, a foot a second or thereabouts—my goodness, you're likely to get some excitement.

Now just imagine two big fat salmon lying in the river. They've been pals all their lives. They went down to the sea together, from the same redds, getting caught a time or two on the way, but always by decent sportsmen who unhooked them and put them back. They've made one safe journey back from sea to the spawning grounds, as grilse, and now they are back again for the second time—experienced, wise old fish of thirty pounds or so. They've learned a lot during a hazardous life.

There they are, lying in a pool, pals for life. A fly is cast over them—beautiful cast, coming right round lovely, at the "right" pace, the "right" depth. The salmon wriggle the old dorsals and snigger to themselves—just another silly old angler. So it goes on, day after day, all day and every day. The things that come over your head! Just fantastic.

Yes, wily big salmon know it all. But however wise and wary, they may be tempted if you cast to them in a thoroughly unorthodox manner. That is to say, instead of casting across and downstream, make your cast well upstream of the fish's lie—about thirty degrees upstream—and put an upstream curve or belly in the line as it hits the water. If you can't manage to put the upstream curve in the line as you make the cast, then roll a piece of line over as soon as your lure hits the water. It comes easy with a bit of practice.

The practical result of fishing this way is that the fly (or spinner, for that

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matter) has time to sink before the current begins to act on it. It travels across the lie slowly, but with a sudden acceleration as the current really gets hold—and just as the salmon is beginning to get interested in it, the current whips it away at a fine old pace. This last flicker of violent acceleration, coming after a deceptively easy amble, often stimulates the fish to have a grab. The lure is behaving in an unorthodox way, you see.

You won't find it in the books.\*

With a spinner on, the trick is to thrust the rod-point under water as soon as the lure hits. Take a couple of quick turns to get more or less in touch, then hardly turn the reel handles at all. The lure then *tumbles*, in a drunkenly attractive way—or, at least, the fish seem to find it so. It is the pressure of the current on the line, more than anything you are doing to the reel, which brings the lure fluttering slowly across the fish's lie, gradually sinking deeper. Then suddenly, just when it has the fish interested, it whizzes off.

Often fish take on the tumble—more often just as it tears off.

I hate to think of the fortune I've spent on tackle. Really, it's mainly waste. Take flies, for instance. I daren't start to calculate how many hundreds of different flies I've bought—not to mention flies I've tied myself. Yet, honestly, anyone taking up fishing might just as well stick to two flies.

Which two? Well, any two, darned near. I've fished the entire season through with a March Brown, in two sizes. I'm more and more inclined to the view, nowadays, that size matters, species doesn't. I followed my one-fly March Brown season with a one-fly Greenwell Glory season—did even better than when I carried three score varieties and spent more than half my time changing the perishers. That way lies complete frustration.

Now take rods. Gee whiz! I notice all the experts in their books start off by telling you what rods you need—usually about five hundred quid's worth. I've gone through the phase, of course; but now I'm down to two rods for fly fishing. A nine-footer which I use for lake-trout and salmon fishing—it handles trout, sea-trout, and salmon perfectly well. The only difference when I'm fishing for salmon is that I use a heavier cast. Salmon fishing with a trout rod is far more fun than it ever was with the old fifteen-foot weaver's beams. If you get stuck into something hefty, you aim to get downstream of it pronto—once you're downstream of the fish, the battle is won. If you have to put on a bit of extra strain, you can point the rod at the fish and virtually hand-line it. But I almost never find that necessary. Half a minute per pound is enough playing time for any fish, except the odd rogue.

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\* Oh yes you will. You'll find it in "Teach Yourself Fly Fishing" (English Universities Press). But it still hasn't caught on—it's still unorthodox, and quite deadly.—Editor.

## *Unorthodox Angling*

And I have a featherweight toothpick fly-rod for the tiny bushed streams.

I must say I get more fun out of fishing today than ever before—and I spend a lot less energy carting gear around.

I suppose the most unorthodox thing I ever did was to put a fresh-run ten-pound salmon back. I did. It was a lovely June morning, about six a.m., when I took him on the monstrosity. We already had four on the bank. This beauty took me downstream towards the sea at a great rate of knots. I got him to the bank twice, but each time, as soon as he saw my ugly mug, he was off like a rocket. Racing down the bank I twice tripped a-over-t and I was covered in mud. When at long last I got on terms with him, I thought, all right, you beauty—any ten-pound fish that can drag me through the mud twice deserves his freedom. And after tailing him, I let him go free.

That's when my reputation for unorthodoxy *really* got going.

But I find as I grow older that the real pleasure of fishing comes to a climax at the moment of hooking. Once you've deceived the fish into taking your lure, once you've felt his weight on the line—you've touched the pinnacle, you've had your fun. What follows is not to be dragged out.

I suppose my home-tied flies are a bit rough-looking, by some amateur standards, not to mention professional. I don't recommend that anyone should follow my way of doing it—if it suits you to be meticulous and make a work of art out of it, well and good. Good for the soul, that is. All I'm saying is that the fish doesn't appreciate your finesse one bit—some really rough-tied flies are absolute killers, while some lovely shop confections are so lifeless in the water you might as well leave them at home for all the good they'll do.

Fishing for bass and flounders I've found that it pays to depart quite radically from the traditional gear and methods. Ten or twelve pound nylon may be necessary for skate and so on, but if you stick to that sort of tackle you are going to miss an awful lot of bites from the shy-biting flounders and small school bass such as haunt my favourite stamping grounds, such as Chichester Harbour, where I like to go out in my little Bermudan sloop and collect a panful of tasty fish on a bright spring morning. I find that if I use something as fine as four-pound nylon I feel the delicate bites better and hook more fish. True, you have to use a fairly substantial running line, on account of the weight you need to hold bottom in the tidal rip. But if, from your ledger bullet downwards, you have this yard or two of really fine nylon—tied to a really fine-wire, light hook—I'm sure you will not only have more fish in the boat, but enjoy the catching of them much more.

And that, after all, brethren, is really what angling is about, isn't it? There's any quantity of fish at the fishmonger's. It's the taking of it, in delightful conditions, which constitutes our sport. Maybe some of my un-



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orthodoxies will shock the purist—to the purist, all things are impure—but they may also add to your fun and your profit. Despite what all the literary angling wisacres say, in their reams of beautiful prose all about the beauties of the natural scene, etcetera, you do feel better about it when you've got a fish or two in the bag.



*Even the most liberal-minded will agree with the most bigoted that bombing and gaffing out fish when running a weir in high water are both completely outside the pale.*

FISHING FANTASY, by J. Hughes-Parry

*I remember one day having had indifferent sport, watching a local fisherman on a north-country stream killing fish after fish with no apparent effort. He was fishing with the most primitive tackle, and would never have impressed the outside with a great idea of his efficiency—but he had a basket full of good trout.*

*For myself, I had the latest thing in rods and reels, 4X casts, and flies of every pattern, and a beautiful basket, though an empty one.*

*I wondered at his success and went to fathom it. His cast was of horsehair, and he was fishing with no less than seven flies of exactly the same pattern—black spiders. Whether he had, by fishing seven of them, induced the fish to believe that there was a hatch of black spiders I cannot say, but he had caught an extraordinary number of very good trout, and according to the locals, he always did.*

FISHING WAYS AND WILES, by Major H. E. Morritt

*Father was in the hut eating lunch when I hooked my first salmon. My shouts and the screech of the old "Perfect" reel (still perfect and in use today) brought him out, sandwich in hand. At last, when my arms were about ready to drop off, the salmon sailed slowly past, a few yards out from the shingle. The guv'nor made a half-hearted stroke and just scratched it. Naturally, it revived instantaneously, and shot off like a rocket. I thought this carelessness unforgivable and let out a pungent stream of all the swear words I knew and some that I was not even aware of knowing (I wasn't supposed to know any of 'em). No mistake was made next time, and both the salmon and I "got it"; I across the rump with the cherry-wood handle of father's gaff. I was told it was for using "foul language", but probably it was intended at least as much to deter me from getting excited and cocky. I still had the weal of that whack long after the salmon had been eaten; but in those days boys thought little or nothing of a whack, and it did 'em good. What a lot of mother's darlings some of 'em are today! Even schoolmasters dare not bonk them.*

TORRIDGE FISHERY, by L. R. N. Gray

FRANK SAWYER

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*Busman's Holiday*

FRANK SAWYER was born in the old Mill House at Bulford, Wiltshire, and was fascinated by the riverside from childhood. He became a river-keeper at 18 and has since looked after fisheries on the upper Avon, with which his name will always be linked. Author of *Keeper of the Stream* and *Nymphs and the Trout*. Has done a good deal of broadcasting and television work. Spent many years in inventing and developing humane animal traps and won the two highest awards presented for such work by the R.S.P.C.A. and the Ministries of Agriculture and Fisheries and Food. Also a shooting man, Frank Sawyer is perhaps the last, or one of the last, of the race of supreme naturalist-keeper-sportsmen.



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FRANK SAWYER

I HAVE ACTED as a consultant on all matters to do with fisheries for many years, and visiting strange rivers to examine or to fish them has always given me considerable interest and pleasure. I had been looking forward to a trip to the West Country where I had made some tentative arrangements to have a look at a couple of waters for different people with a view to improving their sporting value. During a conversation with a friend of mine, who lives in our locality, I mentioned this, and after explaining the areas where the streams are situated he said at once that he knew both places and that just by coincidence he and a friend had planned a visit to those parts in late April.

Both intended to fish for a while in the Eise at Dulverton for salmon in the water belonging to the "Carnarvon Arms" and then go on down to look at some farming projects on Bodmin Moor. Would I care to join the party and we could travel by car together? To me it seemed a heaven-sent opportunity, as my first call was to have been at Morebath, which is quite near to Dulverton, and my second commitment was at Charlestown by St. Austell. It was with some excitement that I altered my plans to fit in, for both of these men know the counties of Devon and Cornwall very well and I knew they could put me wise on many things of which I was woefully ignorant. It would be an education to learn something of these counties from them, for though my great love is fishing, I like to know something of the countryside too.

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The Carnarvon Arms fishery needs no introduction from me, for through the years many thousands of fishermen have stayed at this hotel and caught both salmon and trout from the Exe and Barle nearby. I would however like to explain that the proprietors are Mr. and Mrs. Howell who are daughter and son-in-law of my friend Wilfred Cave with whom it was my intention to travel. He and his friend Alex Gale are both very keen fishermen, and arrangements had been made for beats to be vacant when they arrived. It was with great pleasure that I received an invitation to fish with them. There had been little rain for some time and no salmon had been reported caught, or seen, as high up the Exe as Dulverton. A good spate was needed, and when it rained for several days and rose the level appreciably in the upper Avon valley, I thought this must have been general and that the West Country rivers would all have risen too. Perhaps for once I was going to be lucky and hit it off just right.

It was with some excitement that I packed my bags and selected some tackle I thought would be suitable. The weather seemed to be a little more settled and we set off early in the morning in good spirit. Soon after ten o'clock we were at Dulverton and my first good view of the Exe was when we stopped on the road to look down into the famous Black Pool on the Carnarvon Arms water. First impressions are always very convincing with me, and the sight of this deep pool with water rippling into it down the fast run set my heart beating quickly. I knew at once that it would be a joy to fish this class of river with a fly rod and I was very pleased I had brought one with me. The astonishing thing, however, was that the Exe was so low and clear. All of us had expected it to be somewhat high and perhaps clearing from a recent spate, and yet, here it was at a summer level, and so clear that one could see the bottom in ten feet of water. This dampened the enthusiasm of my two friends who knew this fishery well and when later on we learned that no fish had yet been seen, this despondency deepened. It is quite true you cannot catch salmon if they are not in the river and to be quite honest I like to see a fish or two moving before I start to fish, for then, even if they will not take, you know there is something worth trying for.

Still, we lost no time in unpacking and getting to the first beat, where we were allowed to fish until one o'clock. There is a system of time limits for each beat on the Carnarvon Arms water, and I think it is a very sound one, for the stretch in each beat is rather short and some have much better holding pools than others. In this way a rod has a chance of three or perhaps four beats in a day, and so, if one pool is fishing better than others, he gets the opportunity to try it at some time. I put up my rod, which was one of fourteen feet six inches: I had taken this not knowing just how big the Exe is at this part. I always think, when in doubt, it is best to be over-armed rather

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than the reverse. It is true a shorter one would have been quite ample but this gave me command of every part of the river. My friends preferred to spin but I get much greater joy from fly-fishing and long ago came to the conclusion that one is just as likely to take fish with a fly as with any other contraption spun through the water. When I want to fish deeply then I put up a big fly with sunk line. To my mind a big fly moving well down has just as much attraction as any spinning lure. When the water is warm and clear then of course a much smaller fly and floating line gives one the best chance.

The Exe has some first class fly water at Dulverton and it gave me great pleasure to cast across the runs and see my fly come dancing through the water from one side to the other. Such water always fascinates me as I get a feeling that at any moment a large form will rise up from the bottom and take. I have been a trout fisherman most of my life, and perhaps because I do a lot of nymph fishing I have got into the habit of continuously watching the place in the water where I know my artificial is travelling. Most of the salmon fishing I have done has been in big rivers where the banks have been quite free from overhanging branches and I had not been fishing the Exe long before two of my best flies were lost in an ash and an alder. I had spent quite an hour making up these and two others of similar pattern and it seemed a shame that such creations would just rust and rot without serving the purpose for which they were intended. I have the two others, it is true, but somehow I shall never have much faith in this particular pattern, for after losing the second I changed to something entirely different. Not that this did any good.

We all fished well and for my own part I felt I had been through my part of the beat thoroughly, but when I rejoined my friends no fish had been seen or touched. Alex Gale had got caught up in snags on the bottom, and I think had spent much of his time in the use of an otter. We all sat down to have a chat and we were joined by Mr. Maund, the proprietor of the Dulverton Trout Farm. He confirmed what we all thought, that no fish were up, and since he was an expert who lives on the spot, so to speak, it was plain to us that the chances of finding a fish were very slim.

It was nearing one o'clock, when we were due to change beats, and there, coming down the river bank, were two figures carrying rods. Both were then too distant to see who they were, but we knew they were coming to take over our beat. I could see one was carrying something white and immediately drew the attention of the party to this and as the two came nearer there was no doubt. He had a fish. The hinder of the two was a woman and as they approached still closer we could see it was not one fish but two he was carrying.

It was a man and his wife. Both fish were nine-pounders and she had taken

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both on a gold and brown minnow from the Black Pool run, that same run I had looked at and found so attractive. Somehow I knew there were fish in that pool: why, I cannot explain. I get those feelings sometimes, and the sight of these two fish pleased me. Despite the local opinions the Exe had yielded fish for me to see and confirm my first impression of this very nice water. For the rest of my life my first visit to the Exe to fish will be remembered by the first sight of the Black Pool, and then of this man with the two salmon. After congratulating the lady on her good fortune we left the beat to these anglers and moved off downstream to have a hurried lunch before trying new water.

When the start was made after lunch it was with much greater enthusiasm. It is remarkable just how quickly despair can be changed to hope. But it was no good. If there were fish in that beat they had no inclination to take my fly or the spinners of either of my friends; the only thing I got hitched to soundly was another ash branch and I lost a third fly. I had given Wilfred Cave a new type spinner I had evolved, for him to try. I had made up several of these and it might perhaps be of interest to describe the pattern. A friend had brought me in a fly to copy, which he said was a good one on most rivers. This had been devised by that very knowledgeable salmon fisherman Major Ashley Cooper, and consisted mostly of a very sparse dressing of bright yellow crinkly hair about three and a half inches in length. Where this hair came from I cannot say, but after trying various kinds I managed to get some of the right kind of texture and length from the tail of a white cow.

Obtaining this was no simple matter. There are various herds of cattle in the meadows beside the Avon and often some of these are quite tame, but on this occasion whenever I approached a cow and tried to take hold of its tail, so the creature would move away from me. I had taken a pair of scissors so as to be able to cut off a good hank and finally spotted a cow with a good long white tail, which was lying down. Moving around her gently I managed to take hold of some hair and started to cut it, but, before I had cut halfway through the piece I had in my hand, up she got and away. Holding on to a cow's tail and scissoring off a hank of the hair is no joke when the animal gets up to a gallop and I cannot say what anyone would have thought had they seen me so occupied. Still, it was done, and after washing the hair thoroughly and boiling it in the right coloured dye I had some material which was suitable for dressing the flies. When finished they looked quite attractive, but the hair was not as crinkly as on the prototype.

As you would expect, I made up a few of these flies for my own use, indeed it was two of these I had lost in the overhanging branches along the Exe. Having some hair left over I thought a little experiment might be carried out to dress up a spinner. Having a fair number of small metal devon

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minnows, I gave several of them a dressing with the hair, by giving the metal a liberal coating of clear Bostik just behind the vanes and then binding the hairs on securely with silk. A little trimming up afterwards and I had minnows which looked very much like tube flies. A cast or two later on proved that they spun well and indeed looked extremely attractive.

I had fished one of these all day on the Test at Nursling, and though no fresh fish were then in the water I had a mixed bag of a kelt, a pike and a large brown trout, sufficient indeed to have proved the lure to be both effective and durable. It was this same lure I gave to Wilfred Cave; he accepted my word that it might be useful. Alas for any further conquests. When I met him on coming back up river it was to be told that my spinner now rested in the middle of a tangle of branches into which he had overcast. Telling him not to worry about this loss, and of my own troubles, I quickly attached a second spinner of the same pattern for him and sat down to watch while he fished out a pool.

There was an eddy at the far side which for some reason he could not reach and it looked quite a likely place for a fish. He was using a threadline outfit and after a few more casts which fell short asked if I would have a try. My first cast fell short too, and I attempted a second. I might have known something was wrong the first time, but did not examine the tackle. There was a sudden jerk as the bait went forward and then it went hurtling across the river like a bullet to disappear into a bushy bank a good twenty yards from the far bank of the river, trailing some ten feet of line. It was then I looked at the rod and could see that the whole agate lining of the bottom ring had gone, leaving an edge which was as sharp as a razor. This had cut the line cleanly. My thoughts went back to my gallop behind the cow and the work I had done to make up these new patterns. The last thing I had visualised then was that my efforts would find their last resting place in the bushes of the Exe valley and some without a fish being caught on them. I would say many hundreds of flies and lures have met the same fate on this river.

Our fishing for the day finished with this episode and in the evening we all three went to have a look at the small trout stream I had arranged to examine at Morebath. After a couple of hours in which time I was able to suggest a few things which might lead to improvement, we returned to the Carnarvon Arms. The first thing I noticed on entry were the two salmon which had been taken that morning. These were laid out in the usual manner on a big tray in the hall together with a few of the Exe and Barle trout, and I was then able to study them more thoroughly. I had been told that the Exe salmon are usually rather lean, and these two looked more like grilse in shape than the usual run of fish I had been lucky enough to catch or see. The little trout,



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which indeed did look small beside the salmon, were of the same lean shape and this started off a train of thought which kept me preoccupied and indeed absent-minded all through dinner.

I could quite understand the trout being small and lean, for this is the case in many of the West Country rivers and streams. For the most part the water is extremely acid, and in some cases mineral-tainted, and in consequence the food produced for trout is not very abundant or of value. In many cases, too, the streams are badly bushed along each bank, which keeps the river beds too dark for good production of animal life. I had suggested to my host at Morebath that this was much of the trouble with his little stream and that some improvement could quickly be effected if he let in more sunlight and added some calcium to help break down the acidity. The brownies, however, are natives and are dependent entirely on the food supply produced in their environments. With salmon it is different. It is true these spend the first two years of life in the fresh water, but the general feeding life, when in fact the fish grow, is spent in the sea.

The general opinion, as far as I know, is that the salmon from all over the British Isles, and indeed from other countries, all go to the same feeding place in the sea. If this is indeed true, then how can one account for the leanness of the fish which return to certain rivers year after year. In rivers where brown trout grow quickly and keep in good condition, any salmon which come into such waters are usually in fine order too. So indeed are sea trout. To me it seems highly possible that the ultimate growth of these migratory fish depends to a very great extent on the food supply, or indeed the nature of the food supply, that is taken by the salmon and sea trout whilst in the parr and smolt stages. It is only in very recent times that I have come to discover the amazing value there is in calcium in trout waters. I think this same thing might have some bearing on salmon too. It seems to be very obvious that there is something in calcium which promotes very quick growth and good condition, and to me it seems possible that if salmon and sea trout get plenty of calcium into the blood during their early river life, that this may indeed answer the questions I posed for myself. I leave you to ponder over it too.

It had been arranged that I should fish the famous Black Pool in the morning, and I was on the river with my fly rod soon after nine. We were due to leave for Cornwall at eleven-thirty but my hosts wished me to try this particular pool as there would be no further chance during our stay in the West Country. It was a quiet sunny morning which made it a delight to fish down the rippling water to the pool. The thought of the two fish taken there on the previous day kept me more than usually alert but though I fished deep and shallow, fast and slow, there was no response. My time was running short as once again I reached the tail end of the pool and then the morn-

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ing was made for me as I saw a fish of some eight or nine pounds come forging up from the shallows below to enter the pool. It is seldom one can tempt a running fish, but one can always hope, and I put my fly nicely across his front twice before he disappeared for ever from my sight. Perhaps I shall fish this water again at some time, but even if not, my first and last view of the Black Pool will live on forever in my memory. True, I did not get a fish, but I had found plenty to keep my mind occupied.

At Charlestown I had to examine two lakes, or perhaps ponds would be a more fitting description, as the larger of the two was not more than three acres. I must admit at once that the history and use of these two artificial impounds interested me far more than their value as potential trout waters, as it needed but a glance for me to know the first one was quite hopeless and that there was little chance of much success with the larger one. Charlestown is a small estate which has a port and a dry dock at the sea-front, and to me the whole layout looked more like a miniature setting for a film show than anything which could be of much use in these days of massive ships. The little dry dock could take boats up to four hundred tons and it appeared that the chief industry there was in the shipping out of china clay. This however is by the way. What interested me was that the water to fill this little dock and to keep it filled when the tide was out and ships were being loaded, came from the two artificial lakes which had been constructed entirely for this purpose at a very much higher level. These in turn got their supply of water from a small stream which wound away for several miles up into the moors and the mining area. I shall always think of it as a very simple but extremely well planned use of a tiny stream, and had it been possible to produce trout which would give sport in such a setting, then I am sure such fishing would have been most enjoyable. On such occasions my mind wanders and imagination comes into play. Control sluices were used to release the water from the lakes to fill the dock and I thought of little trout escaping and finding a fresh rising place at the bow or stern of a four hundred ton ship.

From Charlestown we went to the eastern part of Bodmin Moor where Wilfred Cave had been busy for a couple of years in creating first-class pasture and farming land from derelict and almost useless moorland. The sight amazed me, as I think it has others, and it will astound even more in the future. Long before I found out the value of calcium in rivers for the production of fish, Wilfred Cave had been using it to break down the acid soils of the moor. The results are very plain for even a layman to see. Running through one of his farms is a clear and fast-running little stream, and it was this he wanted me to examine. Coming straight from the china clay and mineral area, as we had, the sight of this lovely little brook at once gave me a feeling of contentment. I had seen a miniature dock and now here was a

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miniature trout stream. At no point in the couple of miles I walked was the stream more than eight feet wide and in many places considerably less. The fall in level was steep but there was a very good flow of extremely clear water which had gouged out the peaty soil down to the big rocks over which it had formed at either side.

It was just a series of little pools, some of which were up to three feet in depth, and in these it was a joy to see the little native trout, none larger than about nine inches, which darted for cover immediately they saw me. Here was one stream in the West Country which had not been ruined by the planting of bushes and scrub along its banks, and it held a wealth of aquatic animals as well as trout. My advice to Wilfred Cave was to leave it open to the sunlight and to give it some good dressings with calcium. Later on, if he so desired, he could make one or two larger pools by excavating. I hope at some time in the future I may have the pleasure of fishing this little stream. Without question it would call for some fine tackle and quick reflex action to catch those agile little fish, but I feel sure the enjoyment I could get in getting a brace would far surpass the taking of double that number of two-pounders from an artificially stocked chalk-stream.

A call at the Carnarvon Arms Hotel on our return journey to the South gave us the information that no further salmon had been taken from that part of the Exe. One fish had been hooked and lost—this, perhaps, was the one I saw moving up into the Black Pool. On the tray in the hall, taking pride of place in the very centre, was a solitary little trout. As I looked at it I knew that this small fish had given someone great pleasure to catch, and he could and would be envied by others less fortunate. Here indeed, represented by this one individual, is the main sporting product of the West Country watersheds. Long may they continue to beguile men and women and add to their peace of mind.



*Like mink and mosquitos for malarialogists, maggots are farmed. It's a thriving industry in the season. Highly skilled maggoteers bury up large stocks of horse meat and keep it in cages of perforated zinc. At the right time they introduce a few ripe lady bluebottles which lay the eggs. The event is planned with all the finesse of a stud farm. Too many eggs would upset the nursery and stunt the grubs. They must preserve a balance.*

*In due course the meat literally "works" and the grubs are taken away, sifted through silver sand to give them a polish, graded and sold. . . . On the whole, maggotorium must be rather oppressive on hot days, but the breeders say the smell is quite healthy.*

WITHIN THE STREAMS, by John Hillaby

PETER TOMBLESON

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*Fish Identification*

PETER TOMBLESON is production director of E.M. Art and Publishing Ltd., an East Anglian firm. He is in fact a distinguished East Anglian angler and writer on angling topics, which means that he is familiar with the finest coarse fishing to be had in Britain. Fish recognition is his speciality, and he has been concerned as an expert witness in many cases where the confirmation or otherwise of a record fish depended on his verdict.



## *Fish Identification*

PETER TOMBLESON

ONE OF THE subjects to which I am particularly devoted is that of fish recognition. Not, as that title might suggest, recognition of fish as such by the angler, but of fish as particular fish. In short recognition by the angler of the many different species he catches and may catch in the future.

The sceptic (and there are a few in fishing!) might well ask whether it makes a difference to the sport and its advancement that many of the men who catch roach do not know the difference between a roach and a rudd or a roach and chub. "We are not biologists and don't pretend to be", says the keen angler, adding, somewhat cunningly, "our job is to catch fish not dissect them."

A few years ago, I agree, it might not have made very much difference whether the large dogfish was in fact the greater or lesser spotted variety. It was a dogfish, and one could reasonably let it go at that.

But anglers have now become scientific, whether a few diehards agree or not. We are Twentieth Century anglers armed with bite-alarms, bite indicators, test curves, micrometers and we know about pH, thermoclines, dietary pre-occupation, population dynamics, growth rates, spawning marks and the like. How can we ignore the necessity for current identification? A fish may be a fish, but a roach is not a rudd nor is it a Pomeranian bream.

The younger generation, eagerly absorbing the mathematics of the lateral line and the pharyngeal teeth count, show us the way. It is no longer enough to know how to catch them you must know what to catch.

Over a number of years of identifying fish for individuals and clubs I have

## *Fish Identification*

seen the gradual change from the establishment, personified by the man who has angled for forty years and "ought to know his fish", to the youngster who has never seen a two-pound roach but has astounded his classmates with a detailed essay on cyprinid identification and distribution giving a bibliography that would have done credit to a doctoral thesis. The new angler, the modern generation, is as avid for details of his fish as was his father's for details of the latest clipped wing Spitfire or Brough Superior.

Nowadays if a keen young angler tells me he caught a trout where no one ever caught one before I hesitate before disagreeing for I am likely to be wrong. But his experience is a product of the last few years, perhaps even the last five years and is due to the insistence of a few reliable identifiers of fish thumping their zoological tub at every given opportunity. The road from guesswork to certainty has been a long one for some and even now there are many whose knowledge of the names of the fishes they catch is well below standard.

From personal experience I can say that the man who causes the most trouble where fish are concerned is the old-established veteran angler who is set in his ways and "knows it all". I well remember a near-record dace entry that came up whilst I was on holiday. The fish was acceptable as a dace, but I was later given a scale to examine. That it was a small chub I was certain; the scale had all the signs, most of them too complicated to explain to others without scale reading experience. I telephoned the angler and told him my views. "Impossible", was his reply. "Mr. X who has been fishing for forty years says it's a dace. Besides I've won the club dace cup." And so on.

As I appeared adamant, Mr. X was called to the telephone. He proceeded to tell me in no uncertain manner just how far short of being useful I was. He knew a dace when he saw one and he'd stake his reputation on this. I am not one to throw reputations away lightly, Heaven forbid, but I stuck to my guns with, I must admit, some additional uneasiness, especially when I heard that the Zoo had the fish. It seemed to me that if the Zoo said dace then dace it was.

But I persisted and rang the Zoo. They had not identified the fish, which was in a poor way and being kept under cover. Would I care to come along and identify it for them? Up to London I went and back I came with a small, dead chub. It would be untrue to say that I did not enjoy some of the ensuing telephone conversations, especially with Mr. X, but truthfully I was as sorry as the captor that the fish had not been a dace. The finale of this saga came when the angler's wife who had had a cake designed in the shape of a dace to celebrate her husband's success sent me the bill for it. . . .

Now the moral here is obviously never to count your dace too soon. This angler suffered from one disadvantage when identifying his fish. *He wanted*

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*it to be a dace, and the two species are so similar at that size that very quickly the chub was a dace.*

Coarse fishermen until recently have never really *looked* at their fish. If a man sat in a roach swim and caught small roach all day, and then hooked and landed a small chub, this fish was a large roach simply because the other fish were roach and because he had never before seen either small chub or a large roach.

The sea fisherman catching a dogfish often called his large dogfish a lesser spotted dogfish because this made his catch a better fish than if he called it a greater spotted dogfish. He would no more think of examining its nasal flaps than the roach angler would think of looking at the edges of the fins of his fish to see if they were convex or concave.

Not so long ago I was sent a picture of a large roach in a case, a fish that had been mounted for over twenty years. It was clearly a rudd, and yet the owner and all his friends thought it was a roach. Lack of guidance, you might say and you may well be right, but it seems odd that many anglers still cannot positively identify roach, our commonest freshwater fish and are completely lost with the two species of bream, silver and common.

Unfortunately, anglers tend to be gullible. If they catch an odd fish and their next door neighbour (provided he is an angler) says it is such and such a fish, then it *is*. They accept utterly. At least they used to. Now anglers are more inclined to query and to want to know for themselves.

As I have said, often it is what the angler wants to think that matters. I remember the mako shark that proved to be a porbeagle only after its embryo had been examined by the British Museum. The angler wanted to believe it was a mako because capture of a gravid female would show that mako sharks were breeding off our coasts—something every shark angler would like to prove.

Unfortunately it's just not enough either to show your fish to a so-called expert. I know one university that identified a greater dogfish head as from a lesser dogfish. When I asked them to check and told them what to look for the difference was apparent. Therein lies the secret of identification—knowing exactly what to look for.

Sharks are usually identified fairly easily by their teeth, dogfish by their heads; to name but two common examples. Even so, I receive on average about one dozen dogfish heads a year which are claimed as new British records. I have even motored a long way to see a record mullet and found that, as expected, it was an ordinary bass. Rudd and roach are often confused, chub and roach, and even carp and tench have been. Very often the angler making the mistake has never before seen a fish of the species he is claiming his fish to be. I agree that closely related fish such as common and silver



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bream are difficult, but in recent years it has been found that there is a great difference in the sizes of the eyes of these species. This should help considerably, but there will still be those to whom their fish is indefinite and who need leading and guidance over identification.

Very often the angler will say that the usual points are of no use to him. His dace has straight-edged fins, neither curved in or out, and it seems to have a large mouth. This indecision is typical of the anglers who seem unable to use their eyes properly. In such a case other identification points should be used, size of head, scale size, branched rays in fins and so on. This boils down eventually to what some anglers call sound common sense. A fish to them looks like a chub and very often this immediate reaction is the safest. When they leave their natural instinct, based on experience, behind and begin to look for biological points in which they have not been trained then confusion arrives. Even so there are cases where one can assume too much.

I remember fishing at Chcw Valley Lake with a companion whose testimony as to salmon I would accept without hesitation. As we were fishing a bird-watcher approached us and said, "There's a large fish in the lake. Do you think it's a pike?" We said that it sounded like a pike but on the way to the car we were shown the fish. It was not a pike but a salmon about six pounds. How on earth a dead salmon came to be dumped in a by-road near Britain's top trout reservoir I cannot say. Had it been a large trout the explanation would have been easier, but salmon! We still puzzle over that one.

Of course, that was a case of a fish found near the water, a fish that certainly was not caught on the water. But there are cases of fish turning up where least expected, and yet again confounding those who think they know all the answers.

Barbel are fish that have caused confusion in this respect. They are occasionally reported from streams that seem to have no connection with known barbel waters. A case occurred this year when a six-pound fish was caught in the River Nene at Peterborough; and, to make matters more difficult, it took a surface-floated bait. I identified the fish from a scale and had no doubt about it. It appears likely that this fish was one of half-a-dozen put in the river eight years previously about ten miles away. The odds against hooking one of these fish are so fantastic as to be almost unacceptable; but it *can* happen.

Around about the same time that these fish were put into the Nene a large fish made its way up this river from the estuary. It was identified as a porpoise and as a dolphin, but proved to be a small bottle-nosed shark, which eventually died on the mudbanks, thereby providing an abundance of maggots for local anglers.

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Such fish are rarities, yet every summer specimens of unusual seafish come to light, such as Ray's bream and sunfish and an occasional tunny. The sea angler, of course, has a far more difficult task than the freshwater angler. There are forty-three fish in the sea record list against twenty-one freshwater fish, and there are several sea species not included which are reasonably common.

One may conclude that the average sea fisherman goes through life happily unaware of the differences between a saury pike and a garfish, a twaite shad and an allis shad, a black bream and a red bream. His sport is none the less enjoyable, and he merely follows tradition by calling ballans and corkwings "wrasses" collectively. He is probably more knowledgeable than most on local sea fish names and he knows when he sees one a "bounce", "old wife", "saithe", "skipper" and "Dover sole".

Very often sea anglers are guided, sometimes misguided, by local boatmen whose knowledge of different sea fish is confined to those species most caught when out fishing, and often does not extend to odd fish that come to the hook. Usually either the professional boatman, the angler or the fish merchant sort out the species and they are not usually far out. The freshwater fisherman does not have two or three helpers in this respect. If the fish is not identified straightaway it is never identified correctly, because most freshwater fish are returned to the water, whereas most sea fish of any consequence are taken away.

Identification is more important among freshwater anglers than among sea fishermen because they are often more concerned about whether their fish is the largest of its species caught by club members during the year rather than whether it weighed more than the fish caught by another man. In other words, there are more prizes to be gained by separate species of fish than by weight, except in the large matches.

Enthusiast angling publications have brought about this happier state of affairs, and have assisted largely in helping anglers identify the fish they catch. Where in the past they may have assumed that every angler knows his fish, now they publish regular features on identification with plenty of diagrams to illustrate this. In addition more books on the subject are printed. This is how the juvenile angler, avid as always for reading material, has jumped ahead of his older companions who are inclined to rely (quite unwisely, in many cases) on fish knowledge gained over the years, knowledge never put to the most critical of tests—comparisons with the textbooks.

On a national basis, records are now properly cared for both in England and Eire, where committees exist for record investigation and recording. There is less chance now of a wrong species being accepted as a new record than ever before, a highly desirable state of affairs.

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There are still those who admit to not being able to tell a brill from a turbot, and they are usually the anglers who are not over-likely to catch either. But let them once fish off the Skerries where record turbot may be found and they become at once identification-conscious in the extreme.



It happened in July when the river was dead slow and sluggish. Moggie saw a man sitting under a tree, industriously baiting hook after hook with lobworms, and he had lived by the river long enough to know what was coming next. Sure enough the man took up one end of the line and pegged it down to the bank, almost on the water, and he pulled the other end right across a deep pool so that the main body of the current passed over it. He pegged that end down and went home.

But Moggie had that line out of the water before the poacher was up the next morning. He didn't take the other man's fish—at least, not all of them. There were two or three trout and half-a-dozen eels on the line. He carefully cut them off behind the shoulders and left the heads on the hooks. The line was thrown back into the water. In the tap-room of the Red Lion that night the poacher was heard to say that the biggest otter in the Wharfe had taken up its home at Burnsall—and in some ways he was right.

WITHIN THE STREAMS, by John Hillaby

That fish, being cold-blooded, are more or less insensible to pain has been proved on countless occasions. I am well aware that an incident similar to the following has been recorded by another writer, but nevertheless it is an experience I had in the presence of three independent witnesses. Many years ago when perch fishing in Slapton Ley I landed a small one which was foul-hooked in the eye; in trying to release it the eye came away on the hook and the fish slipped over the side of the boat back into the water. As a matter of curiosity I cast out the tackle again with the eye still impaled on the hook. Almost at once down went the hook, I struck, and to my astonishment brought in the same fish, which had now fed off its own optic! It is impossible to believe that it could have been suffering any pain despite its dreadful mutilation.

INFORMATIVE FISHING, by Coombe Richards

### PIKE SOUP

Clean and wash the fish. Weigh it, and add half a pint of stock to each pound of fish. Add a small onion, and, if handy, a carrot, a parsnip, peppercorns, and a bay leaf. Boil very slowly for  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to 2 hours. Strain. Thicken with flour. Add a little cream or butter. Pepper and salt to taste. Serve with cubes of toast.

Arthur Ransome, quoted in PIKE FISHING, by Dr. W. J. Turrell

MAURICE WIGGIN

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*Two Tales*

MAURICE WIGGIN: The editor of this volume was for ten years Angling Correspondent of *The Sunday Times*, and before that, for several years, of the London *Evening Standard* and the Manchester *Daily Dispatch*. He has written a number of books including *The Passionate Angler*, *Teach Yourself Fly Fishing*, *Fishing For Beginners*, and *Troubled Waters*. A native of Staffordshire, he has been a newspaperman ever since coming down from Oxford, where he was a history Scholar. Has done every job in journalism except sports editor and financial pundit. A well-known critic of television and books, he has also written extensively about motoring and country matters. Married, lives on the Surrey-Sussex border, is keen on thoroughbred cars, cats and cameras, and sails a thoroughbred, too.



## Two Tales

MAURICE WIGGIN

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### 1 *Trefor and the Try Fly*

I MIGHT HAVE KNOWN there was something in the wind when Trefor Sheepdip appeared at my study window one evening just as I was settling down to compose a sermon calculated to strike terror if not reverence into the ungodly of the benighted parish known as Big-Red-Gryffyth's-Sacred-Bones-Lie-Hard-By-The-Grey-Stone-Bridge-Over-The-River-That-Makes-Music.

When I say that the parish to which my call had led me was *known* by that name, I am of course taking a liberty with actual usage. Such indeed was the proper name of the incestuous place, as spelled out on signposts five feet long and dearly beloved by low comedians of the halls and television. In Welsh it sounded even more intimidating, but I had never learned the Welsh (it was one of several things held against me in a parish predominantly dissenting) and had only by trial and error pieced together the translation given above. Fortunately my dear wife, keener than myself to establish smooth social relations in a parish which I had instantly recognised as the supreme challenge to my wavering vocation, mastered the barbarous tongue and by so doing was enabled to pass on sundry items of news which would otherwise have been over my head. In daily parlance the place was known (in Welsh, of course) as Big Red Griff's.

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Trefor Sheep-dip was not the leading farmer in the parish, but that was a mistake which he devoted his time and considerable talent to putting right. He was reputedly the most avaricious and tight-fisted farmer in a community not conspicuous for open-handedness, and it will be understood that when I saw a fowl dangling from his hands as he slunk past the window in his ineffably furtive way, my suspicious mind started whirring like a clock. True, it proved to be an exceedingly leathery old boiler, and my dear wife later confided in me certain doubts about the manner in which it met its end; nevertheless, it was a gift, and a gift, coming from Trefor Sheep-dip, was an event not much less common and portentous than Halley's Comet.

"O, I see you're bussy, iss it?" said Trefor comfortably. "Don't want to interrupt you, effer."

"Tea or whisky?" I replied. I had received Trefor before. The good book enjoins charity upon us all, charity and long-suffering.

"O, well, whateffer you're haffing yourself", Trefor replied, putting it down on the old leather armchair that had come with me all the way from Brasenose, and composing himself for a long and comfortable stay. My wife brewed a meanly weak pot of tea and I put the whisky bottle at Trefor's elbow. He laced his first cup liberally. "I don't often taste this stuff", said Trefor. "Nor do I", I countered with a touch of that asperity which I had long since recognised as the prime stumbling block to a saintly life.

Summoning my scant reserves of patience, I listened through a meticulously ordered and unhurried recital of Trefor's troubles and losses during the past three seasons, and his pessimistic forecast of seasons to come. He was careful to speak ill of no man, yet, somehow, no man emerged from his recital with glory. After three liberally laced cups, and an hour of unimpaired gloom, Trefor at length rose to depart. I nerved myself for the touch.

"You'll find that a nice *chi-cken*", said Trefor with a smile that even my dear wife found almost unendurable. "Loffly tender bird that iss." We stood waiting. This was it, coming up now.

"Going up to see your brother, iss it I hear?" said Trefor. I steeled myself. I was indeed about to pay my annual brief visit to my rich brother, who had a beautiful private stretch of chalk-water in one of the best stockbroker parts. Impure as his life admittedly was in other respects, my brother was one of those impassioned purists who will not allow even the upstream nymph to be fished: the dry fly and the dry fly only is the creed which governs his angling life.

"Yes", I admitted, cautiously. "I am going to Tom's for a day or so."

"I wass chust thinking, see", said Trefor cageily. "I haff a sister living in those parts, married a gamekeeper she did. If you wass driving down in your

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motor, like, I might come with you chust for the company. Stay at my sister's, of course. Would be a bit of company for you on the churney, like."

What could I do? I did feebly bring up the question of the hay harvest, but Trefor waved the objection aside. No hay harvest worth mentioning, it seemed, and anyway the missus could look after that. I was stuck with him.

Now although I knew what was coming as well as if I had received an announcement in black-letter from Pursuivant Herald, how could I tell Trefor that I knew? How could I come right out and say, "Trefor, you are *not* going to fish my brother's water. I am *not* going to sponsor you because I know full well how you fish"? I couldn't do it. It was one of those social *impasses* which leave me feeling that all is not ordered as it might be in an imperfect world. Unless and until Trefor himself mentioned fishing, I was tied. I knew it, he knew it, my dear wife knew it. And there was nothing anyone could do about it.

Summoning the last reserves of Christian charity, I drove Trefor eastwards into the rising sun, the following Monday, and in due course, after a journey marked by Trefor's garrulity and my taciturnity, I dropped him off at his sister's cottage, refusing his pressing invitation to step in and partake of his sister's tea. Nothing was said about any fishing. My uneasiness grew.

Driving down with my brother to the water after dinner, I passed Trefor's sister's cottage and was surprised, indeed astounded, to see Trefor hard at work with his spade in the garden. I thought perhaps I had misjudged the man.

Not so.

We had been fishing barely half-an-hour when Trefor appeared, carrying his grandfather's old greenheart fly-rod. He edged up to us in his sideways manner and touched his hat to my brother. I had no option but to introduce them.

"Don't mind if I stroll down the old afon and take a cast or two, I suppose?" Trefor said. My brother's face darkened and I feared for a moment that he was going to utter the odd unChristian remark. But successful stock-brokers have deep reserves of control. They need them.

"Fly only, mind you", my brother rasped. "Only allow dry fly on this water."

"Ton't you worry, sir", said Trefor smugly. "Try fly it iss. See, I haff my fly pox with me." And opening a matchbox he proudly displayed the dozen or so flies which he had cadged from me over the seasons. They didn't look as if they had ever got wet.

Trefor touched his battered hat again with an air of ludicrous self-satisfaction and slouched off downstream with the gait of a confirmed riparian criminal, which indeed I knew him to be. He vanished out of sight round a bend where a thicket came right down to the water's edge.



## *Two Tales*

My brother and I fished on with what equanimity we could muster, but strong feelings, especially when repressed, operate against judicious dry-fly work, and between us we mustered only a brace. It was particularly exasperating since we had been bidden to return liberally stocked with trout against a lavish luncheon party which my sister-in-law had planned for the following day, when sundry of my brother's ungodly City acquaintances, as yet even richer than he, were due for what is known in some quarters as a softening-up.

However, we need not have worried. Trevor rejoined us at dusk wearing a nauseating smile and carrying thirteen splendid trout in his huge poacher's pockets. I thought my brother was going to have his expected coronary there and then.

"You got all these on the dry fly?" he asked accusingly, when he could get his breath.

"Goodness gracious yess!" said Trevor, in a hurt manner. "Look, here iss the ferry fly I caught them on."

He proudly displayed a Gold-ribbed Hare's Ear, still tied to the end of the cast, which he had wound in roughly round his reel. It did, indeed, show all the signs of having been heavily if unsystematically masticated.

"Well, dammit, I suppose it's all right", my brother observed ungraciously. "We did need a fair number of trout for our guests. Still, dammit, I wouldn't have believed it. Wipes me eye on me own damn water, dammit. And on a damned great ugly hare's lug, of all things."

We parted with mutually insincere expressions of mutual esteem. I did not visit the river next day, the day of the lavish luncheon, until quite late in the evening. After what my brother described as a light recuperative dinner—it would have staved off famine for a fortnight in any African tribal enclave—we strolled down for a recuperative cast or two. Whether it was the effect of our bacchanalian orgies, or not, I would not care to say, but neither of us was in form and we missed the few offers we had. My brother hooked a monster more by luck than judgment and broke the cast on his testy strike.

Rather to my surprise, we saw no sign of Trevor Sheep-dip.

Next morning, after the usual head-shaking ritual had been observed, I left my brother's roof with the usual feeling of guilty relief. I called for Trevor at his sister's cottage and we drove back to Big Red Griff's. Trevor seemed in a good humour. I remarked that I was rather surprised not to have seen him on the water the previous evening.

"Oh, I saw *you*", said Trevor amiably. "I wass fishing the teep water through the wood."

"Indeed", I observed. "And how did you get on?"

"Chust a brace or so", Trevor replied. "On the try fly, of course." He cackled abominably.

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Conversation was one-sided on the long journey home. I was occupied with my thoughts, which tended to be sombre. Trefor, however, rattled on in his unquenchable way. He seemed quite pleased with himself. He compared his own perspicuity favourably with that of his sister's husband, who was content to work as a gamekeeper for a fixed wage and aspired no higher. Out all the hours God sent and little enough to show for it. Didn't even have time to dig the garden.

"Yes, I noticed you digging", I remarked. "I didn't think you farmers were keen on gardening."

"O yess, my sister wass clad to haff a bit of plot turned over", said Trefor unctuously. "Full of worms it wass." He cackled abominably. I shot a keen glance at his predatory pan, and narrowly missed running the old Morris into a tree. He was literally rubbing his horny hands.

"Trefor", I said reproachfully. "You didn't . . . ?"

"Nothing wrong with a bit of a worm so long as it's hooked on a pukka try fly, iss it?" He went off into interminable cackles of self-satisfied mirth.

"Neffor again, Trefor", I said sternly. "I mean, never again."

I was huffy for the rest of the journey, but nothing could abate Trefor's contentment. He even sang, snatches of abominable bardic runes interspersed with soldier's songs of unrepeatable obscenity. I was too huffy to remonstrate.

I dropped him off at his squalid hill farm with a touch of the old hauteur struggling against my natural wish to judge not the meanest of God's creatures.

"Well, Trefor, that's the last time, I'm afraid."

"O, ton't you take it so much to heart, minister", Trefor said agreeably. "What's a prace of trout between friends, eh? All the good Lord's providing, iss it not?"

With which he lugged his battered old basket out of the boot. The string broke, the lid fell off, and there we stood, in the grip of emotions too deep for tears, gazing at thirty-four lovely trout.

## 2 The Gaol-breaker

JACK LISTENED to the voices for what seemed a long time, then he stopped listening and let them drone on and on while he thought about silvery sharp-spined sea bass hunting the sand bar at the harbour's mouth, preying on sand eels and stray returning sea-trout, and he felt the salt slick on his lips.

When he came back to earth someone was saying, "So you see, Jack, it isn't that we have any complaint about your work, it's just that every one of us has to *get with it* and try to capture the new young public. If we stand

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still we slip back. You must see that, Jack. We've got to move with the times, Jack."

Jack rose to his feet and looked out through the plate glass window. Over the huddled city roofs rainclouds were moving.

"I'll go now", Jack heard himself saying. "No hard feelings, chaps but I just can't be bothered. I don't think I really give a monkey's for the new young public. You'll be better off without me. Cheers and all the best. You know you'll all be glad really."

There was a babble of expostulation but Jack walked quietly out of the executive suite and went along to the big communal work room. He thoughtfully emptied the contents of his desk drawers into three or four wastepaper baskets, including the Literary Editor's. To all inquiries and complaints he returned a courteous smile and nothing more.

Jack walked down the marble stairs, hundreds of them, and out into the rainy street. It stank as usual of the effluvia of centuries, sharply pointed-up by exhaust fumes. It was filthy, grey, gross, noisy and ugly. He got a sudden lift from the thought that he wouldn't be seeing it again.

He automatically hailed a taxi but then he remembered in the nick of time how poor he was now, and waved it away. The taxi driver began to expostulate and Jack gave him a half bow and a graceful wave, swiftly changed into a rude gesture as the driver began to curse. He walked on steadily through the filthy mean streets of the metropolis towards his bank. I must remember, he told himself. I must remember I'm a ruined man. He was smiling as he walked through the pelting rain.

At the bank he drew out every penny he had in his account: it came to £239 14s. 1d. The manager was worried about him. Jack begged him not to worry. He took the money in pound notes and stowed them away in various pockets and he walked to Peck's in Grays Inn Road and bought two gross of eyed hooks, assorted sizes from tens for mullet and herring and mackerel to great big skate hooks and conger hooks and he bought several spools of nylon in several strengths including very strong indeed, and a can of light oil. Then he slipped into Leather Lane and had two separate fish-and-chip dinners at two separate establishments and he caught a bus to his lodgings.

Jack changed into his sea-going clothes and bundled up what he wanted to take, which wasn't very much, in two valises, a trunk and a suitcase. He routed out his landlord and made a very bad deal on the spot for his dinner-jacket suit and etceteras and various things which he didn't want any more. He fetched the Mini Traveller round from the lock-up and loaded his gear aboard, with his rods and guns and fishing bags and his portable typewriter. All this took time and it was well on in the afternoon before he nosed the Mini through the traffic south of the river and began to slip through the

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suburbs and out towards Littlehampton. He drove at ease and when the traffic was tiresome he waited and whistled to himself and the journey was not tedious to him.

He off-loaded everything on to the boat and bought paraffin, meths, some new rope, bread, milk, beans, bacon, sausages, butter, a bottle of whisky, eggs and apples. Then he drove round to a motor trader and sold the Mini for cash. Luckily he had bought it there, which made things easier, but he still got a very poor deal. Since this was what he had expected he wasted no time grieving. He stowed the pound notes away and went aboard.

He was hungry again and the tide was still flowing in though nearly full. He made a good meal of bacon and eggs and tea and cleaned all up and checked the rigging and stowed everything away securely. Then at about the first hour of the ebb when the rain stopped and the evening sun broke through he got up sail and slipped his mooring and crossed the bar.

The sea was oily and bearable and the wind light veering south-west. Jack stood out from land until the buildings were a blur and began to beat down the Channel. When night fell the sea and the wind got up a bit and Jack took a nip of whisky and put his lights in the rigging and ate a hunk of fresh bread. The sickness came about midnight and Jack took another swig of whisky and hung on doggedly, and it passed as it always did, on the first trip after time ashore. When he felt the calm good feeling coming on again Jack ate an apple and more bread and in a lull he managed to make a mug of coffee. Then everything went peaceful and calm and he sailed on happily through the night, sometimes dozing at the helm and sometimes wide awake and shivering and a little afraid. He was still beating against a light fitful breeze and when at daybreak he stood in a few points and recognised the land he was surprised how little headway he had made through a long night. He stood in to a little anchorage and anchored and slept for a few hours. Then he bought more provisions and put out again to sea. He sailed all day and before dusk he put in again and spent the night sleeping, though not ashore.

In this way, sailing all day and sleeping in harbour, Jack made the slow and difficult voyage down the Channel against the contrary wind. He was in no hurry and sometimes he stayed a day or two, sleeping aboard in his tiny cabin or cuddy to save money, and usually he bought food and cooked it himself. He fished a good deal, catching bass, pollack, bream, plaice and flounders. Days drifted into weeks as he edged slowly westward on his idle cruise; he did not chance his little boat when the sea was very bad, for he could wait. By the time he got into Cornish waters the mackerel were coming and he caught them in abundance, and lived royally.

It was his intention to cross the Irish Sea. He knew that this was asking

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much of himself and his small craft, for neither was better than ordinary. He knew this; he had a clear and clean appreciation of his nature and his boat's; he did not delude himself. He was afraid of losing the land and his life in the Western Approaches. He waited patiently in a Cornish port until the weather changed and settled and he knew it was the best he would get and it was now or never. He wrote a letter and posted it to an Irish address and with a double dram of whisky in him and a fluttering heart he put to sea.

He sailed all day and all night and through the next day and the next night, and as he sailed his heart grew lighter. The boat flew like a bird and the wind was constant though light, and when he slept she sailed herself and he awoke each time stronger and happier and he knew now he had done right. On the third evening he raised Cork harbour.

He rested here and ate large strong meals and drank porter and slept many hours. He dried out his boat and examined every inch of her and one day when he felt that all was propitious he set forth again to sail around the south-west corner of Ireland and into the Atlantic. He had a hard time of it, in fact he had several hard times; but he was cautious as well as confident and he took no risks. He had the time. Whenever he put in to port there was someone to be friendly and helpful, and as the summer waxed he was inching his way by sea along the green coasts of the counties he loved.

Now he was thin and hard and burnt black by sun and salt wind and he still shaved whenever he could and used his needle promptly and he never let domestic squalor creep up on him. He reorganised his stowage in the light of experience and whenever anything wanted doing he did it there and then. He had no master now but his self-discipline developed as he sailed, he grew silently proud of his trim and his gear, and having nothing to do but live and no-one to satisfy but himself he filled his time with practical things and tolerated no shortcomings. He was a much better sailor now than when he left London. Though he was always glad to put in to port and go ashore he was also glad to put out again to sea. He grew taciturn on the trip. He had always been laconic. He recollected reading somewhere that lone sailors hunger for the sound of a human voice, but he did not hunger. Nor did he feel aggressive. He felt no rancour, nor envy; he felt contained and content. He knew where he was going.

His hands had chafed and blistered and bled but now they were healed and hard, harder than he remembered they had ever been. He liked using them.

One fine day he rounded Sheep's Head and instantly a bright breeze swung abaft him and carried him chuckling at a great pace through the champagne water of Bantry Bay. His little boat now careworn and shabby but still light in the water carried him buoyantly in and he smiled to himself as she heeled

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and purred. Then at last there came the moment when he sought very carefully for his landmarks and a little before evening he drove ashore on the last of the suddenly-dying breeze in a tiny cove and as he heaved up the board he felt the gravel chatter on the keel and as he leaped out to shove her home willing hands were helping him. So he came to haven.

That night after they had stowed his gear in the little stone cottage and feasted rarely on mutton stew and the last of his whisky he went out with the old friend who had awaited him and they walked the few yards to the tide's edge in the little cove. The sea was ebbing fast now but it would come in again tomorrow and he would ride out on it many times, fishing for the fine Atlantic fish and adventuring the little world, that was plenty big enough, of Bantry Bay.

He was tired and a little drunk with exaltation and success but he did not want to go to sleep. It was a deep velvet night and the lamp they had left burning in the cottage was the only light to be seen. When a small breeze came up from the sea they shivered and turned inland. He felt the small stuff crunch and slide under his feet as he walked home.



*Soon the fly is floating down the pearl-bright water, and soon a fish will rise and take it, and come splashing and tumbling to the net you hold, all his fins working to sustain him in his element. In that moment will have been created a whole scheme and elaboration of tensions, which entirely include us, me with my rod and line and reel, my hands and indeed all my body inextricably involved, and you leaning forward with the long-handled net, and the fish impelled towards us in a fluent argument of curves. Mean sensual man, impale this coherent moment in your memory. There is a balance achieved, a trembling harmony, that in a moment will be resolved into a million components of other harmonies yet unscored. Observe now, the fish I hold for a minute in the water, how his gill plates pulsate, and now he is sliding back into the deep water, and now he might never have been extracted. The trees behind us, the tall grassy bank, impose a pattern in the mirror of water which is of them but not them, and opposite, willows hang over another bank, and the barred sky is broken in the bright river that flows between the trees and the trees.*

*It was flowing before the trees took root, before the first fishes swam; long, long before the first men walked. Yet here we are, parvenus of creation, walking like lords. Contradictory bipeds, unpredictable and savage, brilliant and tender. Pressing our feet into the green grasses, and in the sweet light divining communities we cannot enter, breathing and beautiful in their translucent caves.*

THE PASSIONATE ANGLER, by Maurice Wiggan